



THE BIRMINGHAM GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

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www.birminghamgenealogy.org

<http://birminghamgenealogy.wordpress.com/>

THE PIONEER TRAILS NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2015

General Meeting for April: The Birmingham Genealogical Society will meet at 2:00 p.m. on **Saturday, April 25th** on the fourth floor of the Birmingham Public Library (in the Arrington Auditorium). The Board of Directors will meet at 1:00 p.m. in the same room.

Please join us as BGS member Jim Anderson presents "The Evil Email Empire, or who's trying to trick me now?" Although not a statistic, it appears that many folks interested in genealogy could be classified as "seniors" and it is this group that evil people have targeted with numerous schemes to get us to open a scam email. "Phishing", "spoofing" and "hacking" were not part of the general vocabulary until the Internet matured. What these terms really mean is the subject of Jim's topic. He will show examples, and give his views on what you can do to better protect yourself from this evil empire.

Please join us for this informative program!

UPCOMING EVENTS: The Blue Star Salute is an annual event designed to "Honor Those Who Serve - Those Who Have Served (Veterans) - And, Those Who Have Fallen in Military Service" hosted by the Blue Star Salute Foundation. The 11th Annual Blue Star Salute for Alabama is set for Saturday, May 16, 2015 at the USS Alabama Battleship Memorial Park in Mobile. A host of local and state-wide organizations and government entities have come together to make this a very special day. The 2nd Annual Memorial 5K Run/Walk for Alabama's Fallen Heroes will start the day off at 7:30 a.m. The Blue Star Salute Program starts at 10:00 and the Gold Star Salute to Alabama's Fallen is set for 1:00 p.m. Static displays and vendor booths will be open during the day. Links to an overview video of last year's Salute, Run/Walk registration forms for this year and other info can be found at <http://www.bluestarsalute.org/>.

The Prattville Dragoons Camp 1524, SCV have been cleaning up and preserving Prattville's historic Indian Hill Cemetery and ACPA's Autauga County Representative Benny Harris has served as the Cemetery Project Coordinator. A lot of sweat and time has gone into this restoration effort and work is now nearly complete. A Rededication Ceremony is scheduled at the cemetery on Monday, April 27, 2015 at 5:30 p.m. in what promises to be a gala affair. The cemetery is located on County Road 86 just past Arrowhead Drive.

The past is not dead. It isn't even past. --William Faulkner

Scott A. Martin, BGS Newsletter Editor



The Birmingham Municipal airport was first located in Ensley in Jefferson County, Alabama

Contributed by Donna Causey (<http://alabamapioneers.com>)

The first Municipal Airport was located near Ensley. This is the story of how it started. In 1919, Major James A. Meissner, a WWI flying ace and a former member of Eddie Rickenbacker's famous "Hat-in-the-Ring" Squadron, organized ten to twelve ex-aviators from WWI in Birmingham. The club was named the Birmingham Flying Club with its primary purpose to promote aviation in the City of Birmingham and the State of Alabama. The club eventually culminated in the first Birmingham Municipal Airport. Major James Armand Meissner (1896–1936) was born in Loudoudery, Novia Scotia. He lived in Birmingham as a child and young man. His father was an executive with U.S. Steel and was here as an officer of TCI. The family home was in New York. He received his high school education in Brooklyn, New York and attended Cornell where he studied engineering. As a member of the college's corps of cadets, he enlisted in the U. S. Signal Corps and graduated with the first class of the School of Military Aeronautics on July 14, 1917 against his father's wishes. Meissner was commissioned a 1st lieutenant on November 20, 1917 and reported to the famous 94th Pursuit Squadron, one of the oldest units in the United States Air Force. Among his colleagues in the unit were Eddie Rickenbacker and members of the Lafayette Escadrille. As the first American squadron in operation, its aviators were allowed to create their squadron insignia. They used the opportunity to commemorate the United States entry into World War I by taking the phrase of tossing one's "hat in the ring" (a boxing phrase to signify one's willingness to become a challenger) and symbolizing it with the literal image of Uncle Sam's red, white and blue top hat going through a ring. Piloting a French-made Nieuport 28, Meissner scored his first aerial kill over the Forêt De La Rappe on 2 May 1918; he was fortunate to survive, given the fabric was shredding off his top wing even as he scored. At any rate, the feat earned the Distinguished Service Cross and the Croix de Guerre. He was accredited with eight aerial victories and awarded two Distinguished Service Crosses. He was discharged as a major on March 25, 1919 and returned to Cornell to complete his master's in engineering. After receiving his diploma, Meissner moved to Birmingham where he was employed at Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company's rail mill. He married Elve Kessler from Augusta, Georgia. Only one airport, Dixie Field, served the city of Birmingham in 1919. It was a small grass strip east of Elmwood Cemetery. In 1919, Major James A. Meissner and Henry Badham (father of the director John Badham) organized the Birmingham Flying Club. Some local businessmen contributed liberally their time and money to assist the group and leased a tract of land near Ensley. On January 21, 1922, the 135th Observation Squadron of the Alabama National Guard was formed. Roberts Field, located west of downtown Birmingham and north of Dixie Field was built in 1922 and served as Birmingham's municipal airport for a number of years. The 90-acre site was bounded by Village Creek and the Frisco Railroad to the north and by 13th Street Ensley to the south. Its 3,200 foot main runway area ran southwest-northeast across the property. Its hanger buildings were located on the southeast corner, near present-day Roberts Industrial Drive and the right-of-way for I-20/59. Aviation was not new to the city of Birmingham. The first airplane had been brought to the city in 1909 when E.T. Odum brought one to the Alabama State fair. An employee of the Wright brothers by the name of Phil Parmalee was the first pilot to fly over the city. By the end of July the unit was operating a fleet of seven Curtiss JN-4D "Jenny" airplanes, housed in metal hangar buildings. The observation squadron mapped and surveyed many government projects as highways, dams and inland waterways. The National Guard flew the first airmail routes in Alabama in 1928. St. Tammany Gulf Coast Airways used Roberts Field, beginning on May 2, 1928 for the state's first regularly scheduled commercial air service, which included a stop at Bates Field, Mobile's municipal airport, on the route between Atlanta and New Orleans. Delta Air Service began using the field in 1929 for their 6-seat Travel Air service that went from Dallas to Birmingham but American Airways could not land their Ford built planes there. This prompted the city to begin construction of its new Municipal Airport which opened in 1931. In 1931, Birmingham replaced Roberts Field with a big new municipal airport and passenger service to Dallas, Atlanta, and other cities. Roberts Field remained open for at least ten more years, but was redeveloped for industrial uses around the 1960s.

Birmingham's 'axe-men' and copycat killers left 18 dead, 16 injured from 1919 until 1924

Contributed by Jeremy Gray (<http://blog.al.com>)

BIRMINGHAM, Alabama -- From 1919 through 1924, a series of ax murders created panic in the streets of Birmingham. It is very likely that multiple assailants were responsible for the crimes and at least a few 'copycat' killers emerged as news reports chronicled the case. "There is no monster in Birmingham," Birmingham Police Chief Fred McDuff told the Birmingham Age-Herald in 1923. "The creature viewed as one individual is a figment of the imagination." Regardless of who was responsible, the attacks left 18 people dead and 16 injured over the course more than four years. Here are the victims. The names of the slain are marked in bold:

- G.T. Ary attacked with an ax Nov. 28, 1919, at the chain store he managed at 801 13th St. S. Ary died the next day without ever regaining consciousness.
- John Besler, 65, attacked either on Dec. 23 or Dec. 24, 1919, at the mercantile shop he ran for 25 years at 1801 5th Ave. N. Besler was found bound and gagged and his cash register emptied. Although Besler had been beaten with a shovel, his death was listed as one of the earliest ax slayings.
- C.C. Pipkins attacked, but survived, March 5, 1921, at his grocery store at 500 Walker St. in West End. Two men hit Pipkins in the head with an ax. Two customers scared away the attackers. Pipkins was unable to describe his attackers, The News reported, but the customers said they were two black men.
- J.J. Whittle attacked, but survived, June 18, 1921, at Eighth Avenue North and Weaver St. Two men came in and asked to buy an onion. When Whittle went to get it, he was struck with an ax.
- Charles Baldone, wife, Mary, and 14-year-old daughter Virginia, attacked July 13, 1921, at their shop at 4510 10th Ave. N. The three spent several weeks in a hospital. "Robbery, vendetta, and vengeance of negro tenants were advanced as possible motive," The News reported. Other News reports said the Baldones refused to identify their attackers and that police believed the attack was the result of "a family vendetta." The couple's 3-year-old son, Frank, told police he saw a black man strike his father, The News reported. A descendant, Birmingham tailor Butch Baldone, believes the attack was the work of "The Black Hand," a ring of extortionists that plagued immigrant communities nationwide.
- H.L. Dorsky attacked, but survived, Aug. 17, 1921 at his shop at 719 16th St. N.
- Sophie Zipin, also identified in other reports at Sophia Zapin, was attacked, but survived, in August 1921 in the vicinity of 16th Street and Eighth Avenue; reports do not give exact location or exact date.
- Mrs. Sam Zideman attacked, but survived, Sept. 6, 1921, at her shop at 1700 9th Ave. N. She was hit in the head with a stick when she refused to give up a cash register containing \$60. Police said they were looking for two black men seen entering the store just before the robbery.
- Joseph Mantione, 32, and Susie Mantione, 20, killed at their store at 32nd Avenue North and Church Street Dec. 21, 1921. Their store was then set on fire. A black woman named Lillie Byrd was convicted in the case, which police said was a dispute over a bill Byrd owed.
- Mose Parker, the first black victim, found slain in the backyard of his home in Titusville Dec. 21, 1921 -- three hours after the Mantiones are found in their Collegeville store. A News report said he was wearing no hat or shoes and had died long before he was found. An exact address was not reported.

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- Clem Crawford and his wife, identified only as Mrs. C.S. Crawford, are attacked Jan. 11, 1922, in their store at 1501 Ave. D. She is struck in the head with an ax, apparently as she served a customer, and her throat was cut as she fought back. Clem Crawford was struck down as he fought to protect her. She died that night; he died Jan. 17. Their 3-year-old daughter, Josephine Crawford, is unharmed.
- Tony Lorino and Rosa Lorino attacked, but survived, Jan. 26, 1922 at 337 12th St. S. Tony Lorino was struck with either an ax or hammer as he served a customer. Rosa came in with their 11-month-old in her arms and was attacked. Tony managed to get two guns and shoot at his attackers as they assaulted his wife. The baby was not injured. Other spellings of their names -- Larino and Lareno -- are frequently used in subsequent reports.
- Joe Lucia and Lena Lucia attacked, but survived, June 3, 1922 at 2005 Jasper Road.
- J.H. Seay, 60, attacked and robbed, but survived, Sept. 30, 1922, at his grocery store at 39th Street North and 35th Avenue North. Seay tells police he can't remember the assault, which left him with a gash from his forehead to his ear.
- Julius Silverburg, a white 20-year-old telegrapher, and Louise Carter, a black woman, suffer fatal head injuries in an assault Oct. 21, 1922 in an alley behind a home at 1816 6th Ave. N. Carter died that night; Silverburg died eight days later. Birmingham police at first blame "a negro organization" seeking to prevent "intermingling of the races." Eventually, police link these deaths, and the slaying of John Robert Turner three months later, to five people they said comprised the "axe gang" that targeted immigrant merchants.
- Abraham Levine, 40, and his wife, Sarah, are lured from their store at 1600 4th Ave. N. on Nov. 6, 1922, and assaulted by a man who says he wants to rent a house they own. The man re-enters the store "with the evident intent of attacking" their daughter Emma, 16, but buys eggs from her instead when another customer enters the store. The girl and her uncle soon find Abraham Levine and Sarah behind the store. Abraham Levine dies two days later; Sarah Levine recovers.
- John Robert Turner, a white painter and paper hanger who lived in Pratt City, and a black woman, Lillie Belle (also spelled by The News as Lilly Bell and Lillie Bell), are found injured and tied up at her home at at 518 23rd St. N. on Jan. 6, 1923. Turner, who suffered three blows to the head, soon died at the scene. Early reports said Belle (or Bell), who had four head wounds, died months after the attack, but subsequent articles said she survived and testified against suspect Peyton Johnson in his second trial two years later.
- Joseph Klein, 55, slain Jan. 10, 1923, at 1406 8th Ave. N. His 14-year-old daughter Ethel was also attacked but survived. Witnesses said they saw a man park a car across the street and go in the shop. Police said Klein leaned over to get the man some oats while another man turned out the lights. Klein was struck in the head with an ax and died. His pockets were emptied. "Heard someone groan ... walked to front, but lights out. Something hit me. I fell to floor," Ethel told The News. Joseph was a Russian who lived in Birmingham for eight years.
- Luig Vitellaro, 42, and wife, Josephine, 32, were slain Jan. 23, 1923 at their grocery store, Vitellaro Groceries and Meats, at 2431 8th Ave. N. Luig was hit as he picked up a bag of potatoes. Josephine was killed when she heard a noise and went to investigate. Police found an ax wrapped in bloody newspaper and a bloodied knife. Luig survived for about a week, but police said he pretended to be asleep when detectives tried to question him in the hospital. White men were seen in the shop shortly before the attack.
- Charley Graffeo, 31, slain in his grocery store at 1500 7th Ave. N. May 28, 1923. Graffeo, police told The News, was likely killed by an ax-wielding man who tried to blackmail him because of his bootlegging. Graffeo was struck down as he filled a bottle with oil. His adjoining home was ransacked and a five-cent piece was left on the counter.

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•Elizabeth Romeo, 65, and her daughter Juliet Vigilant attacked in a grocery store at 210 21st St. S. Oct. 23, 1923. Vigilants' husband, Bernard Vigilant, returned home from a play -- Channing Pollock's "The Fool" -- to find Juliet had been struck in the head with a meat cleaver and her throat cut ear to ear. She died the next day. Romeo was struck in the head with the cleaver and killed while she slept in a bed with the Vigilant's 3-year-old daughter Caroline. The child was not harmed.

•Clem Williams, a black miner who delivered The News in the Overton mining camp, was found with "his head split open" and an ax on his chest at his kitchen table March 19, 1924. Williams is the second black victim and the first following a conviction and a reported "free will" confession in the earlier cases. Three men, all black were arrested, but it was unclear if anyone was ever convicted.

•L.M. Watkins and Richard Warner were found with severe head injuries -- but later recovered -- on May 25, 1924. The first victim was found about midnight after being struck with an ax and robbed at 1513 4th Ave. N. About two hours later, Jefferson County Sheriff's deputies went to serve an arrest warrant on a woman at 806 14th St. N. and stumbled over the second victim as they walked onto her porch. A black man, Frank Owens, was arrested by police a short time later and shot in the arm during a struggle with officers. Police found Owens carrying a small, blood-covered ax. Owens said he wanted to emulate the "axe men" and later leaped from a window while being fingerprinted and suffered a serious head injury. Owens was sentenced to hang.

Research & Genealogical Tips - courtesy of © Michael John Neill,
"Genealogy Tip of the Day." <http://genealogytipoftheday.blogspot.com>, TIPDATE.

It's hard to write a "quick tip" or set of rules for making certain that two records refer to the same person. There are many variables to consider when deciding that two people in different records are the same person. That said, here are some things to think about when trying to determine if two records actually refer to the same person: are the names reasonably similar? Are the ages consistent? Is the occupation and lifestyle consistent? Are you not violating the laws of physics or biology? Are the locations reasonably consistent? Think before you conclude that two people in different sources are the same person. Don't just assume that they are.



When you get all "into" researching a person or family in an area that is unfamiliar to you, do you stop and take the time to find maps of the areas where the people of interest live? It is important to know county, state, and other boundaries and the relative proximity of the places where you think people live. It's even more imperative in a "new" area where the geography may be unknown to you. Don't assume you "know" the geography "good enough" or that the states are small enough that it doesn't matter. Look at maps. Analyze locations. Determine how far apart different residences for your ancestor are. Don't get so caught up in the search that you lose sight of the geography in the process.

Researching the "entire family" can get expensive, particularly if a family is relatively large. However, do you have any female siblings of an ancestor who were military widows and who applied for a pension benefit based upon their husband's service? While the information about the husband may not always be directly related to your research on the wife's family, the paperwork the widow filed may mention her date and place of marriage and even include testimony from those who knew her before her marriage or who were at her marriage. Frequently these people are biological relatives of the wife. And those are people in whom you are interested. It's even possible that your ancestor provided a statement in his or her sister's widow's pension application. So look at those aunts of your ancestor--did any of them apply for a widow's pension?

If one of your relatives was under the legal age to marry, see what consent documents are with their marriage license or record. The parent may have signed somewhere on the record, given verbal consent form only, or signed an actual letter granting permission.

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TROTWOOD PARK

Contributed by Becki McAnnally

Two horse racetracks flourished around the turn of the century. Trotwood Park was located at 75th Street and 9th Avenue North. “The eastern end of the Birmingham Municipal Airport lies adjacent to the former location of the track. The other track, built in 1889 by the Birmingham Jockey Club, was one mile in length and ran parallel to Third Avenue West. It was part of the Birmingham Fair Association.” The Jockey Club track failed in its first year of operation but later became the main attraction of the Alabama State Fair. On October 7, 1906, a motorcycle race was held on the track and automobiles used the track on Saturdays from October 10, 1906 through 1917. The track closed in 1921 due to dilapidated buildings, tracks and grandstands.

In 1925, it opened again with a new track and seating for 10,000 and horses raced Monday through Friday. “An estimated 30,000 fans witnessed Frenchman Jean La Costa set a world speed record of 60 mph on a closed course that year.” Beginning in 1925, a special automobile race was held on Saturday's and soon became very popular so by the mid-1930s, horse racing at fairgrounds disappeared and automobiles took over. The former horse track is still at the same location but it has been shortened to five-eighths of a mile, paved and now named the Birmingham International Raceway. Dr. Marvin Whiting, city archivist, said the horse races were one of the most popular events at the state fairs at the turn of the century with people coming from all over the country to watch the races.

Trotwood Park in East Lake closed shortly after the turn of the century. Mrs. Thelma Green, of Helena, reported to the Birmingham News that she was born and lived in a house that served as the stables and grandstand for Trotwood Park. Her Aunt Susie and Uncle Charlie Graham, managed the park and her mother worked at the track boarding the horses. (Charlie and Susie were also the Aunt and Uncle of Becki McAnnally, an Alabama Pioneers' author). Mrs. Green recalled, “I can still remember when I was 4 or 5 years-old and we'd run around the track and play out there. The house was built 12 foot in the air with the big front porch serving as the grandstands. The space under the house was fenced in and that was where the horses were stabled.”

“I wasn't born until after they had quit running the races, but I sure remember the track,” Mrs. Green continued. “I still remember my mother and aunt and uncle telling stories about the races, too. The races were for rich folks then. Birmingham's rich folks would come and sit on the porch and watch the races every weekend. It was a big social event.” Mrs. Green said there was no legalized gambling (“Aunt Susie would have run them all off”). Both horse tracks in those days were all harness races with a driver operating from a two-wheeled, one seat sulky carriage pulled behind the horse. Judges at the state fair races, according to *The Birmingham Daily News* of 1891, “noted that year's state fair races judges were Hamilton Bushey and David Bonner. Bushey was editor of *Turf, Field and Farm*, a well-respected horseman's journal, and Bonner was the 'most noted owner of fast horse in the world' and founder of the *New York Ledger*. Horses and drivers who raced were not usually from Birmingham but in 1902, Katie S, belonged to a Birmingham owner, stole the show with a big victory by beating horses from Kentucky, North Carolina and around the country.

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