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April 2012

Establishing Kinship with Family Reunion Announcements

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by Patricia Bravender

ESTABLISHING KINSHIP BETWEEN MEMBERS OF EXTENDED families separated over many generations by time and distance can be challenging, even for experienced researchers. In the absence of vital records or detailed census data, which other sources can show connections between these divergent families? One overlooked resource that can establish kinship and perhaps even some exact relationships is family reunion records. Family reunions were — and remain — popular social events where extended family members gathered, usually once every year in the summer. According to historian Robert M. Taylor, Jr., family reunions “gained popularity after the Civil War in tandem with the blossoming of genealogy.”^[1] At a time of “a rising sentiment for rediscovering and renewing kin ties,” these reunions helped to maintain kin solidarity in response to the rapid social changes sweeping the nation.^[2]

I was researching the Hines family, and beginning to doubt I’d ever be able to reconstruct the family relationships, when I found written accounts of family reunions that helped me establish many connections.

Establishing Kinship with Family Reunion Announcements

Hines family

In just over a century, descendants of Richard and Elizabeth (—) Hines of Rhode Island and Massachusetts spread across the continent. Details about their lives are scarce. Richard served in the 2nd Rhode Island Regiment during the Revolutionary War and died in penury in Colrain, Massachusetts, in 1820. Very little is known about Elizabeth, including her maiden name. Their only known son, Abraham Woodward Hines (1787–1873), and his children were pioneer settlers in Vermont, then in the Western Reserve and the Northwest Territory. Throughout the nineteenth century,

Richard and Elizabeth’s descendants continued to move westward and, as new land opened in Iowa and the Dakotas, settled there. By the turn of the twentieth century, fifth-generation descendants had reached the Pacific Ocean and were living in Oregon, Washington, California, and even Alaska.

Abraham W. Hines supposedly fathered at least twenty-one children by his first two wives over forty years. While he and his sons continually pushed west, his daughters married, changed their surnames, and often remained behind with their new families. Other descendants died early, leaving orphan children whose ties to the family were cut off. Connections between many of Abraham’s descendants were eventually lost. Identifying members of this sprawling family and their exact relationships has been difficult, further complicated since the Hines surname was common and unrelated families often lived in the same communities. And Hines is spelled in a variety of ways in census, land, and vital records, which also causes confusion.

During my research I identified four probable sons of Abraham by his first wife, Hope Titus, whom he married in Shrewsbury, Vermont, in 1805. These four likely sons were: Alanson, Robert T., Abram B., and Sidney, all born in Vermont; at least two — and probably all — were indentured as children to neighboring farmers. Although circumstantial evidence suggests that the four are Abraham’s sons, no vital records definitively identify

Above: The 1936 Hines family reunion.

their parents. Abraham's six sons (Benjamin F., Lewis H., Willis G., Charles, Richard S., and William) with his second wife, Amanda Davis, whom he married in Conway, Massachusetts, in 1821, all served in the Civil War, and each left a substantial paper trail proving kinship to Abraham and to each other. This trail included pension applications and detailed marriage and death records. By the late 1850s, Abraham, his three likely sons,^[3] and his six known sons all lived in Lorain and Lucas Counties, Ohio. Abraham lived with families from both lines at various times. Couldn't I somehow prove brotherhood, or at least kinship, between these men?

Hines family reunions

I knew that the Hines family had held annual reunions because my grandmother, Helen (Nicklas) Hines, told me that she had attended some in the 1930s and 1940s. She even had group photographs. Unfortunately, the quality of the photos was poor and most individuals could not be identified. My grandmother remembered that "Uncle Dick attended" or that "a cousin named Cullen used to come." Her stories and photographs provided clues to the names and relationships of the attendees but no substantive evidence of kinship.

My grandmother and I even attended a revival of the Hines reunions in Lorain County in the late 1980s. We were invited by a Hines researcher who was also seeking a possible connection between our lines. Like me, many members of the Lorain County Hines families believed we had a common ancestor, but no one knew the exact kinship or had records of earlier family reunions. We had a wonderful time at the reunion, but we came no closer to understanding the connection between our families, if one even existed.

My discovery of written accounts of the Hines family reunions was serendipitous. When full-text searchable newspapers became available on *Ancestry.com* and other websites, many Lorain County newspapers were included. Those papers, like others of the time, published information about the daily lives of residents. Sometimes listed under column headlines such as "personals" or "local happenings," the comings and goings of the locals were fully reported. Family reunions were important social events and were often covered with as much detail as weddings and deaths. While searching these newspapers online for Hines family members, I found reports of reunions, ranging from brief announcements to detailed lists of attendees.

Through news items in the Elyria *Chronicle-Telegram* I found that Hines reunions were always held in August, usually on the third Saturday. Most were

held in Lorain County, but occasionally in Michigan, Pennsylvania, or Indiana. A Hines family reunion was first held in 1907; gatherings continued annually for more than fifty years.

The following reports, and others like them, were found in the personal columns of the *Chronicle-Telegram*:

August 18, 1921 — Miss Gladys Hines of the East Side left today with her uncle and his family from Wellington for Richmond, Ind. to attend the Hines family reunion. The trip will be by machine.^[4]

September 5, 1933 — Mr. and Mrs. C.C. Hines, Mr. & Mrs. Myron Hines and family attended the Hines reunion at Cascade Park in Elyria last Saturday.^[5]

August 23, 1935 — The 28th annual reunion of the Hines descendants was held last Saturday at the Town Hall. About fifty four were present from New Castle, Pennsylvania, Elyria, Cleveland, Strongsville, Kalamazoo, Mich., Lorain, Litchfield, Medina, North Oberlin, North Royalton, Wellington, and here. Officers were elected as follows: Pres. Cullen Hines; Sec. & Treas. Mrs. Cullen Hines from Kalamazoo, Michigan. A sumptuous picnic dinner was served at noon. Music and dancing



The author's family at a Hines reunion, circa 1939. The children are James Lewis Hines, the author's father, and his sister, Shirlee Jean Hines. The adults, from left to right, are Helen (Nicklas) Hines, the author's grandmother; James Madison Hines and Ethel (Stringham) Hines, the author's great-grandparents; and James Nelson Hines, the author's grandfather.

were enjoyed. The next reunion for 1936 will be held at Cascade Park, Elyria on the 3rd Saturday in August. Will Girward had the misfortune to fall at the reunion and injure his arm and it was necessary to have the aid of a physician.^[6]

August 22, 1957 — Mr. and Mrs. George Ensign and family attended the 50th annual Hines reunion at Litchfield Town Hall Sunday. Mr. and Mrs. Earl Hines were host and hostess. The attendance was about 75. A basket lunch was served later.^[7]

August 22, 1957 — About 65 attended the 50th Hines reunion at the town hall Sunday. The birthdays of Chelice Baish and Mrs. Genevieve Welsh of Wellington were observed. A layer cake, beautifully decorated, was cut for the occasion.^[8]

Once I knew the reunions were held each August, I searched newspapers in other locales where family members lived. For example, Abraham and his six sons by his second wife settled near Saranac, Ionia County, Michigan, in the early 1860s. Although the Saranac newspaper, the *Saranac Advertiser*, is not searchable online, weekly issues from 1894 through 1970 have been digitized and the DVD is available at the town library. I downloaded the images onto my computer and read the August and September issues, those most likely to contain reports of the reunions. I did find mention of Hines reunions, including this one:

August 12, 1909 — Richard Hines and son Nelson left Tuesday for Wellington, Ohio where they will attend a reunion of the Hines family.^[9]

I have been researching the Hines family for many years and have a database on the descendants of all suspected children of Richard and Elizabeth. As I read the newspaper reports of Hines family reunions, I immediately recognized names of people I had researched. Some I knew to be descendants of Abram B. Hines, believed to be Abraham W. Hines's son by the first marriage in Vermont, and some were descendants of children by his second wife. While not proving that Abram B.

Hines was a son of Abraham W. Hines, the fact that descendants of children from both wives attended these family reunions is strong evidence of kinship. These

Sources of online digitized historical newspapers

- Historical Newspaper Collection, *Ancestry.com*
- America's Historical Newspapers, Newsbank, Inc. (available to NEHGS members on *AmericanAncestors.org*)
- 19th Century U.S. Newspapers, Proquest
- *Newspaperarchive.com*

Search tip: Be creative with search terms. The original language of some relevant articles contained the phrases "Hines family reunion," "Hines reunion," and "reunion of the Hines family." If a database allows only for name searching, you can fool it into searching for phrases by putting key terms in the first name box and the last name box; for example, first name "Hines" and last name "reunion" or "family."

Sources of historical newspapers in print, microform, or digital format

- Local libraries, archives, and historical societies
- State library and archives
- Newspaper offices

Search tip: Limit your print or microfilm search of historical newspapers to the summer months, the most likely time for reunions. Don't forget September, especially if the paper was weekly. Once you know the layout of the paper, you will quickly recognize the sections most likely to contain reports of reunions. If you can't visit the local library or archive, request microfilm of the newspaper through interlibrary loan.

Other sources of information about family reunions

- Donated reunion papers and records in local libraries, archives and historical societies in your ancestors' communities.
- Reunion records may be found on their own or as part of family association records in national libraries and archives such as the Library of Congress, the National Archives, the Daughters of the American Revolution library, and NEHGS.

Search tip: Find family reunion and family association records by searching union catalogs describing collections at various libraries and archives, such as *Worldcat.org* and *ArchiveGrid.org*.

Don't forget Google

- A general Google search might lead to a posting about previous or current reunions, links to archives, or a fellow reunion researcher.
- The Google News Archive has links to newspapers, both free and fee-based, and a search of Google Books might locate, for instance, a speech given at a 25th family reunion of interest.

reports are also interesting for what they do not contain: they never mention descendants of two other suspected sons of Abraham, Alanson and Robert T., who lived in neighboring Lucas County.

Like many family reunion groups, the Hines family elected a secretary who likely kept reunion records. Although I have not located them in any library or historical society, I am hopeful that they still exist and, if found, will further clarify kinship among descendants of Abraham W. Hines. ♦

Notes

¹ Robert M. Taylor, "Summoning the Wandering Tribes: Genealogy and Family Reunions in American History," *Journal of Social History*, 16:2 (1982): 21.

² *Ibid.*, 22.

³ One probable son, Sidney Hines, disappeared from the records and presumably died.

⁴ *Chronicle-Telegram* (Elyria, Ohio), August 18, 1921, 4. Viewed at *Ancestry.com*.

⁵ *Chronicle-Telegram* (Elyria, Ohio), September 5, 1933, 5. Viewed at *Ancestry.com*.

⁶ *Chronicle-Telegram* (Elyria, Ohio), August 23, 1935, 4. Viewed at *Ancestry.com*.

⁷ *Chronicle-Telegram* (Elyria, Ohio), August 22, 1957, 10. Viewed at *Ancestry.com*.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁹ *Saranac (Mich.) Advertiser*, August 12, 1909, 1. Digitized copy available at the Saranac Public Library.

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