

Returning to the Ancestral Homeland

By Claire Smith

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I first started my genealogical research journey sixteen years ago after moving to Bainbridge Island from Massachusetts. I started by ordering microfilms at the local Family History Center in Poulsbo. BIGS, founded in 2005, provided me with a great opportunity to develop my research skills. Mentors, presentations, special interest groups, discussions and with other genealogists and a spirit of collaboration all fueled the fire.

It's funny that I developed my genealogy addiction after moving so far away from my ancestors. How frustrating it was to be 3,000 miles away from my dead ancestors and the records they left behind! Whenever I came home to New England, where I had been born and raised, I'd sneak in a day or two for research.

Now, after sixteen years, I've returned to my ancestral homeland. I was a little worried that I would lose my interest in genealogy but that doesn't seem to be the case! I'm seeing my old haunts with a fresh perspective. Now my problem is that there's an overwhelming abundance of genealogical material all around me. Where do I begin?

I'm constantly reminded that I'm surrounded by my ancestors as I have them in four of the five surrounding towns. As I drive around, I see streets and even buildings named after them. That's not to mention the local town halls, historical societies and libraries. My head spins when I think of all the records I now have easy access to. It's not a bad problem to have!

It's easy to be reminded of the history that my ancestors lived. On Patriot's Day, we were excited to see the Minutemen re-enactors marching past our house on their way to the North Bridge in Concord to join with others to reenact the famous battle with the British. It gave me chills thinking that my own ancestors were part of this critical phase of our country's formation.





We visited the Garrison House in Haverhill where my ancestors lived in the 1600s. The brick garrisons were built to protect families during Indian raids; they couldn't be burned down. It's a good reminder that my ancestors here in Massachusetts were living on the very edge of civilization.

I'm missing BIGS and trying to figure out where I fit in the local genealogical community. It is now time to focus on my own research, so I'm "cherry picking" the events I attend. There are a few groups that might become my home group, but there's nothing quite like BIGS. I am a bit biased though. I miss the camaraderie and inspiration. I'm continuing to give lectures, and I'm keen to continue to learn and improve my research skills.

Even though I'm 3000 miles away, I'm available to BIGS members as a mentor. I look forward to continuing to participate from afar.