

Time travel - going back for family and general history

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Time travel. This is a hard one. How far back in family history? I suppose I have to choose....

First, I would love to have a peek at my grandfather's boyhood. I heard some stories growing up, literally at his knee. Plus I did have a chance to meet a couple of his boyhood buddies. How about being a mouse in the corner while the boys at his all male high school would shoot spit balls at the German teacher while his back was to them. Or watching the time he fell out of a row boat on a local pond and would have drowned as a non-swimmer if his hands hadn't surfaced close enough to grab the boats gunwale. Or be around to watch him beating rugs for his mother during spring cleaning.

I would have loved to have been in the audience as my grandfather and his buddy Mr. Earl (who was the one who talked him into going to Syracuse University in the first place) entertained with readings in small area towns to help pay for their college. Mr. Earl presented serious reading and Grandpa performed comedy skits, often involving dialects in imitation of various immigrant groups. At that same time, he and my grandmother were "The" couple of the theater group at SU and seemed to always be cast in the leading roles. Seeing them perform would be a double treat as I never had a chance to meet my grandmother. She died of breast cancer when my mother was 15.

As for deeper family history, I could go back to the Mayflower, but enough has been written about that to satisfy my curiosity. What I would rather learn is why the next generation, at least some of the sons of Edward Doty, my great, great.....(you get the picture) left Plymouth for Long Island. What was the motivation for dispersing from their childhood home? That family branch certainly ended up not having much of a wander lust because they stayed put for almost two centuries, spreading only as far as Brooklyn, until my grandfather's buddy enticed him away from NYC to Syracuse. That must have been a big step.

There is another branch of the family I would love to have a peak at. This one also dovetails with larger historical events in that my progenitor, John Porter, was a large land owner outside of Salem at the time of the infamous witch trials. I was relieved to learn that he was on the right side of history on that one. Although much has been written about this, it would be interesting to be able to interview the people involved.

All of these events and many more would be fascinating. Too bad there is no time machine to whisk us back. We will have to depend on family stories, written history, and our imaginations.