

Wow, was this weekend big! Correcting one set of errors about my grand-aunt led me to find an absolutely horrific story about her, her husband, and her children. I'm telling it to you in all its gory glory, ruminating a bit on how my great-grandparents were responsible for parts of it, and drawing what genealogical lessons and morals I can from it and passing those on to you. Honestly, it's the worst story I've ever run across in my tree, involving orphan's asylums, mental hospitals, untimely and tragic and violent deaths, and lives unfulfilled, while parallel lives went on undisturbed, comfortable, and full of success. The whole story made me stop and think about what little I knew about part of my mother's family, and confirmed some suspicions that had been handed down to me about my great-grandmother. Tune in for this one.



Hello and welcome to episode 202 of From Paper To People, Ancestors Alive! Genealogy's unpredictable podcast. My name is Carolynn ni Lochlainn, your hostess with the mostest, and I'm here this week to tell you a newly-discovered, downright Gothic family story I found in my tree, complete with a genealogical moral or two. I came across this story because I was working across tree platforms, and I found a problem I would not have otherwise. That happens a lot, and it underscores the need we all have to revisit different sections of our trees periodically and rework them, because frequently, we will find errors.

This weekend's prompt to revisit was the Wikitree Scan-a-Thon. I only joined Wikitree on Thursday, which was slightly suicidal of me since I then jumped right into a photo upload challenge. A few listeners who are in the Facebook group told me about it, and I decided to try it because I figured that learning a new platform would give me new challenges. We had a team of three. Next time there's a scan-a-thon, I'll let folks know ahead of time, and any listeners who are on Wikitree can join the From Paper To People team. It'll be fun.

The problem for me with Wikitree is that I wanted to get a quick start and upload my gedcom

file, but it's way too big – the trials and tribulations of shuffling – and I don't have Family Tree Maker right now, so I couldn't chop my tree in two and upload my mother's side and then my dad's. So, I had to do manual entry for every person I wanted to add. Only then could I start to upload photographs. I got to my mother's father's mother, and I was inexplicably drawn to her sister. That happens sometimes. I went back over to Ancestry, and I took a good long look at what I had for this woman. Her name was Luella Schutt. I know, it's not a great name. My great-grandmother's name was Debra Dorcas Schutt. Not much better. For background, this story takes place in Fountain County, Indiana and Vermilion County, Illinois, and the records for Indiana are very, very good. I really thought I had nailed this part of the family down a long time ago. But I was wrong.

For the second time in as many days, I found that I had made a rather big error on Ancestry. I had mistakenly conflated Luella Schutt with another woman in the same county, a woman named Mary Luella Shively. So, I extricated all of the sources for Mary Luella Shively from Luella Schutt, deleted everything that bound the two together, including an incorrect husband and all of the incorrect children, and once I had done that there, and then double-checked FamilySearch (oops), I started looking for the correct information about Luella Schutt. And what I found was the most awful story I have ever found in my immediate tree. It also made me wonder about the character of my own great-grandmother, and about what personality traits get handed down. Ultimately, it really disgusted me.

Luella Schutt was married twice. Her first husband, Herman Orvis, disappears from the record immediately after they're married in 1892. In fact, the only record I can find on him to do with their marriage is their marriage license. I found Census for Herman in 1870 and 1880, but otherwise, he's a mystery. I don't know whether he left her, or died, or what. Nevertheless, he disappeared. In 1896, Luella remarried, to Henry Guy Welch. They had three children. The first, Guy William Welch, was born in 1897. The second, Mary Welch, was born in 1898. And the third, George Welch, was born in 1905. This is where the tragedy starts.

In 1901, Guy William, their eldest child, died of a combination of diphtheria and malaria. He

was 4 years old. This must have been a terrible blow, and a tragic loss for them. They had a little girl who was only 3 years old at the time. At that time, young children dying of disease was commonplace, but that doesn't make it any less awful.

In 1906, Luella died. Her death certificate shows the cause of death as "burns from coal oil or gasoline," and it took her 9 hours to die. This means that she was lighting a lamp in the home, the fuel spilled onto her, and she accidentally lit herself on fire. The entire household saw this, as the fire happened at five in the morning according to the death certificate. It must have been truly terrifying for everyone, and a terribly painful way for Luella to die.

Henry now had two small children to care for, Mary aged 7 and George aged 10 months. He'd already lost a child, and seen his wife burned to death. He had a lot of cousins in the area but no siblings, and apparently, it was too much for him. The following year, 1907, he too died. His death certificate showed the initial cause was appendicitis for a period of 12 days, but the secondary cause, and I quote, was "insanity and refusal to take proper care of self" for a period of 10 days. Presumably, this was because he didn't take medical direction and have his appendix removed. Henry's death made Mary and George orphans. Mary was 9, George 2.

This is where it really gets Gothic for me - Mary was immediately taken in by some of her father's family in Danville, Illinois. She was handed around from household to household until she died in 1932, unmarried and without children. She had people around her, but I can't imagine that her life was very happy. She was listed as a companion in the 1910 census, when she was 12, and by 1930, when she was 32, she was listed as a foster daughter to a couple that did not share any last names with her family, and who were less than 10 years older than she. I still haven't quite figured out how they relate to her. They might have just been good friends of hers. She never seemed to have any kind of job or profession, listed in adulthood as "at home" in the census, and she had no independence. I can't imagine that this was all that fulfilling for her since she was never the lady of the household. And I wonder, did she know where her brother was? Did they write to each other? Or were they forbidden contact by the adults around her? George could read and write, per the 1920 census. But as

you'll see, he didn't have much else going for him.

In fact, George's situation was horrendous. I can't find him in the 1910 census, but in the 1920, he is listed as an inmate in the Indianapolis Orphans' Asylum. Remember, his father died in 1907, so he had to go somewhere at the age of two. And, just so you get the contrast in my family, his first cousin, my grandfather, who was an only child, was being raised by George's aunt, my great-grandmother. They had a very solid home life. They had a very solid family. My great-grandfather was in the Quartermaster Corps in the Army. They were stationed in Jeffersonville, Indiana with family ties in New Ross, a little town between Indianapolis and Crawfordsville. But I don't understand why on Earth my great-grandmother didn't take that little boy, or both children, in. George was born a year before my grandfather. It couldn't have been that hard to take care of an infant who was orphaned, and Mary would have been helpful around the house, as girls of that era were. They were Dorcas' only sister's children. It just doesn't compute.

I know I'm ranting, but seriously, think about it. Think about your own family. Put yourself in those same pairs of shoes. I know that if my sister's family were in that same tragic position, I would have taken both of those children in in a hot minute. No discussion. And yet, George ended up in the Orphans' Asylum and Mary was living in another state, isolated.

The worst part of it to me is that in 1907, Indiana led the way with an absolutely disgusting law – the nation's first eugenics law, which mandated sterilization of certain “criminals, idiots, rapists and imbeciles” being held in state custody. And the Orphan's Asylum was state custody. So any family member NOT taking this little boy into their home knew that they were placing him in grave danger of state-sanctioned sterilization.

The law basically said that certain people were not worthy of reproducing. Paupers were included in this. Approved definitions of mental illness were sweeping, using terms like “feeble-minded,” so there's no telling what they included. ADHD, depression, epilepsy, autism, Down's Syndrome and post-partum depression for certain, but all sorts of things

could get a person institutionalized. So, as a two-year-old boy, the year that he probably went into the institution, George entered the system that looked at him as someone who could potentially be sterilized, simply for being in an institution. And his presence there was proof that he belonged there, circular logic if ever I heard it. His relatives, including my great-grandparents, all knew it, and allowed it.

He stayed there at the Orphans' Asylum until at least the age of 14, in 1920. Wouldn't living in an orphanage depress anybody? Mess with your mind in some way or other? Make you angry, hopeless, resentful? I think that, if I were orphaned at age 2 and completely cut off from family, I would be less than happy with my lot. I've visited and taken photos of the Orphan Asylum's graveyard in Indianapolis. It is as bleak as they come. If he wasn't mentally ill going in, George's life might well have rendered him so.

The eugenics law was overturned in 1921 by the Indiana Supreme Court. Apparently it wasn't being used, anyway, so there's hope that a vasectomy wasn't forced upon George, violating his 14th Amendment rights. But it doesn't make any of this less terrible, as you will see.

In the 1930 and 1940 censuses, George is listed as an inmate at the Muscatatuck Colony Institution for the Feeble-minded in Campbell, in the southeastern portion of Indiana. The 1940 census also indicates that he was there in 1935. Then, I found his death certificate. It shows that he died in 1967, at age 62, in Fort Wayne, of primary gastric carcinoma and generalized carcinomatosis, and that he was sick for three months, with "known" written in parentheses. This means that he had tumors all over his body, and they weren't sure how long he had been sick before they started treating him. And when I tried to figure out why he was in Fort Wayne, Indiana, which is considerably north of where he was born, and of Indianapolis, and certainly of Campbell, I was struck with the true tragedy of his life. It turned out that he entered the Fort Wayne State Hospital and Training Center in 1940, right out of Muscatatuck, and stayed there until his death. It too was a mental hospital, albeit with a nicer name. That means that, absent information between 1907 and 1910, and from the 1910 Census, he lived his entire life in state institutions, without family, and he died completely

alone. Without looking at his medical records, there's no knowing why he actually was in institutions, apart from being orphaned and being put in an Orphans' Asylum. Maybe family did try to raise him for a while, but he was resentful or acted out, so they dumped him in the Asylum. Or, maybe he was placed immediately in the Asylum. Regardless, he lived his life in big, cold, limestone buildings without family and without hope.

I have such pity for him. He was my grandfather's first cousin. And rather than being buried, his body was given to the Anatomical Board in Indianapolis, which provided bodies for research at the IU School of Medicine. I have created non-burial Find-a-grave memorials for him and for his brother Guy William, and linked them to his parents.

I look at the lives of my grandfather and his cousin in parallel, and it makes me ill. In 1920, while George was in the Orphan's Asylum, my grandfather was attending school in Washington DC, right before his father was transferred to two years in the Canal Zone, in Panama. In 1930, while George was in Muscatatuck, my grandfather was in Nebraska, finishing college and engaged to my grandmother. In 1940, while George was at Muscatatuck and then transferring to the State Hospital and Training Center, my grandfather was a surgeon in the Army, moving his family from assignment to assignment all over the country and even to Japan in 1946. In the 1950s, while George continued to live at the State Hospital and Training Center, my grandparents lived in Hawaii, my grandfather was chief of surgery at Tripler Hospital, and they took troop transports to Hong Kong to have their clothing custom made from Japanese and Chinese silk. And when George died in 1967, my grandfather had retired from the Army and was lecturing medical classes in Manhattan. I can't help but wonder how differently George's life might have turned out if only Dorcas had taken George in.

And that's the next thing that really bothers me about this: who my great-grandparents were. My grandfather was a massively spoiled only child, one year younger than George. His dad's position in the Army meant that they were always comfortable financially. Grandpa got to see a lot as a kid. He wanted for nothing. He was the center of every family reunion, as is

evidenced by family photographs I have. What were you thinking, Dorcas Schutt? How on Earth could you let your dead sister's children go? Be separated from one another? How could you let deeply traumatized children be split up like that? Did you really only have room for one child in your home?

I also wonder about Dorcas, because my mom used to tell me that she was overly-cutesy with kids. Nauseatingly so. She said that the birthday cards she got from Dorcas were always oojie-boojie ookie-wookie cutie baby, and that she acted that way with Mom, too. And it always made my mom want to hurl. She thought there was something insincere about it. Now, I REALLY wonder more than ever about this woman, and about her husband, who also didn't insist they take the children.

Above and beyond the sadness and horror of this story, there is a genealogical lesson here. Actually, there are multiple lessons here. The first lesson is: no matter how much work you've done on your tree, there's always something more to do. Always. I've been working on my grandfather's side of the tree for at least 35 years, and I found written materials that he made up, admittedly based on his father's side only, but I never came across this until this past weekend.

Second, it's always possible to engage in some hygienealogy and scrub, not just shrub, your tree. Scrubbing involves looking at a person in a section of your tree that you haven't looked at in a while with a critical eye, as if you've never seen him or her before, and just walking through all of the sources attached, and all of the relationships, as if somebody else did the work. Be ruthless. Assume everything is a lie. Re-prove all of it to yourself. We all need to be ruthless with ourselves, because this is history. We need to be honest. Softsoap and wishing wells won't do the job.

Third, when you hit a brick wall, SCRUB ELSEWHERE. It's just as valid as any other work you can do on your tree. I have found two sets of errors in the past seven days that I had to repair, all because I went in with a critical eye. They were decently honest, easily-made

mistakes, but they needed to be fixed. And once I had fixed them, I was so happy! I knew that anyone who DID rely on my tree for DNA-related facts had better information because of the repairs I'd just made.

If you shrub and scrub, you will find extraordinary things, and it will make you a better genealogist and a better family historian. I promise.

That's all I've got for you this week, folks - It's a tiring and terrible story, so I think you're probably done, too. Stop by patreon.com/join/ancestorsalive to support the podcast with a monthly membership in my Patreon Army, get some swag and access to my Facebook group. Until next time, do your research, don't be a Jeffrey, scrub your tree, and above all, Expect Surprises!



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