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Pictured, from left, Lake Havasu Genealogical Society's Larry Hayduck, Jane Bowen, Kate Alonzo, Buzz Bancroft and Charlene Filipiak.

Buck Dopp/Special to Today's News-Herald

TRACING OUR ROOTS

Lake Havasu Genealogical Society helps connect families to history

By **BUCK DOPP**

SPECIAL TO TODAY'S NEWS-HERALD

Every now and then we hear of someone who is related to royalty or a celebrity, and wonder if we might also be descended from a famous person, such as Susan B. Anthony, Louisa May Alcott, Francis Bacon or Ludwig van Beethoven.

The Lake Havasu Genealogical Society, which celebrated its 30th anniversary last October, provides free training and assistance to anyone who wants to investigate family history. The society's research library contains over 3,000 books and periodicals, and is located at suite #17 in Shambles Village, 2126 N. McCulloch Blvd.

Charlene Filipiak, who is the membership administrator and web master for the society, describes herself as "a city girl whose ancestors were a lot of farmers from Wisconsin." When she was 14-years old, her father told her he was going to take her "to see some relatives." He took her to a cemetery.

"That cemetery was where I got bit by the genealogy bug," Filipiak said with a laugh.

Turning more serious, she recalled a gravestone that left an indelible impression on the teenage girl. The grave marker listed the deaths of three children from the same family—Ann, Eliza and Patrick Crenien—who all died within a 2 ½ year span from 1861 to



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The gravestone that inspired Charlene Filipiak to research her family history.

1864. In fact, five of the eight children in the Crenien family died before reaching adulthood. That tombstone gave her a glimpse of the tough lives and extreme hardship suffered by their parents, who were her 2nd great grandparents.

Filipek said the most significant takeaway from researching genealogy is that, "What you're told about your family, isn't always the truth. I was always told the wrong year for my maternal grandparents' wedding—1926."

Her detective work

revealed that they were really married in 1929, two years after her mother was born, which meant her mother was illegitimate. Her "grandfather" raised her mother as his own child and gave her his surname. When Filipiak's mother applied for college at 18, and a birth certificate was required, her step-father officially adopted her to spare her any embarrassment. Filipiak's mom and grandparents took the secret to their graves.

"I had a gaping hole in my family tree, but a DNA test solved the mystery," she said. It took three years to find out the truth that her mother's biological father was a married man whose own wife was pregnant at the time.

The discovery didn't make Filipiak think any less of her grandparents. It only increased her respect for them. She admired the courage it took for her grandmother, who was only 19, to keep her baby and endure the public shame showered on out-of-wedlock mothers in the 1920s. It would have been far easier to give the baby up for adoption.

Filipek says everyone researches genealogy for different reasons such as ethnicity, health tendencies, or to write a history. "Not everything is found online. That's why the Lake Havasu Genealogy Research Library is such a good asset for our remote community."

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She enjoys helping people find their official documents, which is an important aspect of developing a family history. "Genealogy without documentation is mythology," she noted.

"We're not a group of professional genealogists. We're just everyday people. We'll help you, but we won't do your research for you." She added, "The library is open to the public and run by volunteers through fundraisers and donations."

Filipiak shared one final piece of good advice for would-be genealogical gumshoes: "Before getting their DNA tested, they should keep in mind, they might find out something they didn't want to know."

Kathleen "Kate" Alonzo, however, is pleased with the results of her DNA testing that exploded a family myth she had heard since childhood, that she came

from a family of "Scottish sheep stealers."

She was relieved to learn that 98% of her ancestors were actually Irish peasants on both sides of her family. "My father's side was completely different from what we were told," Alonzo said, grinning from ear to ear. "Things passed down aren't necessarily the truth."

Inspired by her sister-in-law who is also a society member, Alonzo is one of the newbies, joining in January of 2017, nevertheless, her sleuthing skills would even make fellow Brit Sherlock Holmes proud.

"I've always been interested in history. Thirty years ago, my uncle asked me to look up the grave of his grandmother in Surrey, England," she explained. She found it, although it took a lot of time going through church records and two visits to a graveyard.

She spent two hours looking for her grandfather's death certificate because a lot of Irish have the same name. "Research takes a long time. Don't expect miracles overnight. It's not going to happen," Alonzo said. "It can get very frustrating. You can sit there for hours and you don't get anything. Then all at once you find a long-lost relative!"

One of those long-lost relatives was her 2nd great grandfather who founded a Quaker school in Ireland.

Speaking of long-lost relatives, Larry Hayduk (pronounced HAY-Duke) traced his family genealogy back to one of the 101 passengers on the Mayflower. Those brave souls risked a dangerous transatlantic voyage in 1620 to flee the religious persecution of King James of England. Hayduk is the 13th generation since the Mayflower's landing and had to verify the birth, marriage and

death of every person in his family line in order to be admitted into the prestigious Mayflower Society. It took him 2 ½ years to gather the necessary documentation.

What excites Hayduk about genealogical research is the challenge: "It's like solving a crossword puzzle. It's frustrating when you run into a block wall, and when you get a breakthrough, it's euphoric."

His advice is to talk to grandparents and older relatives about the family history before you do anything else. Get as much documentation as you can, including birth and death certificates.

"I started researching my genealogy late in life. Too late to be able to ask parents, aunts, uncles and grandparents the many questions that I had," he said. "I decided to document my life so future generations' questions would be answered."