

The Family History Tour Was a Success

Personal Interviews, Cemetery Visits, and Library Research Yield Positive Results

May 16, 2011

Some 37 family members participated in a variety of events during the Family History Tour that I organized in Michigan and Canada during April 12 to April 21, 2011. Participants were relatives of Murray Coleman and Kathleen Steil, representing several branches of the family tree, including descendants of the Colemans, Steils, Baslers, and Patersons.

My spouse, Michael A. Vasquez, dropped me off at the airport in Los Angeles on the morning of April 12. I was picked up later that day at the Detroit airport by my brother, Larry Coleman. I stayed the first three nights with Larry and his fiancé, Ann Quail.

Larry was my driver and companion on Wednesday, April 13. We visited three cemeteries that day: Oakview in Royal Oak, Woodlawn in Detroit, and Mount Olivet in Detroit. We took photos of the headstones marking the graves of various relatives. In some cases, we took video footage while one of us read short biographical scripts near some of the graves.



Larry looks for the grave of William Henry Coleman

Oakview is the burial site for William Henry Coleman (1864-1941). William was the oldest of the eight children of our great grandparents, Calvert Coleman and Sarah Westfall. Arthur Roy Coleman, our paternal grandfather, was the youngest of the eight. William lived in Ferndale with his wife, Jessie Croton, and their two children, William and Sarah. Jessie, William, and Sarah are buried in Oakview along with William, although William is the only one with a headstone.

From Royal Oak we drove down Woodward Avenue through Ferndale and stopped just south of Eight Mile Road. Woodlawn Cemetery, the final resting place for

several Coleman relatives, is located across from the former Michigan State Fairgrounds. Larry and I went into the cemetery office to double check the plot numbers for some of the graves we planned to visit.



Visiting the grave of Arthur Roy Coleman in 2001

It had been several years since Larry and I had been at this cemetery. On that occasion – celebrating the 80th birthday of our mother – we were accompanied by all of our siblings and by our Aunt Betty Basler. What we did not know at that time was that, in addition to our Grandpa Roy, our Aunt Jean, and our Grand Aunt Agnes, there were several other Coleman relatives buried at Woodlawn Cemetery too. This time, Larry and I would make sure to look for all of them.

After leaving the cemetery office, Larry and I drove to Section 21-A. The first familiar headstone we saw marked the grave of our Aunt Agnes. The headstone said Agnes Murray since Murray was her surname when she died in 1978. Her maiden name was Agnes Paterson. She was the sister of our paternal grandmother, Margaret, known to us as Grandma Finney although she was born as Margaret Paterson.



Jean was only six when she died

Just beyond were the headstones of Grandpa Roy and his daughter Jean. When I saw Jean's headstone, I realized for the first time that her middle name was taken from the maiden name of

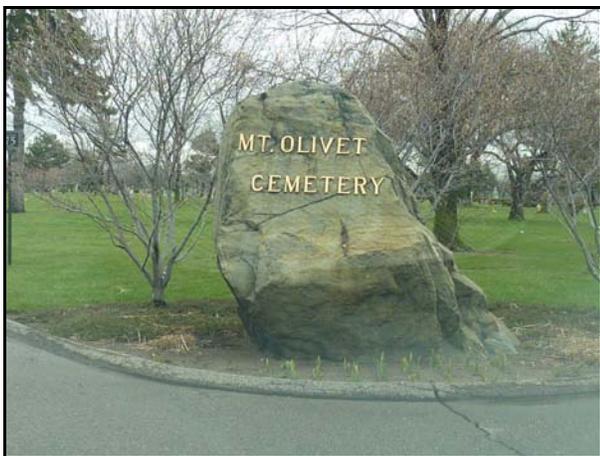
Jean's maternal grandmother, Fanny Hope.

Larry and I then moved on to Section 13 of the cemetery. Through my contact with family researcher Clarice Coleman, I had learned our great grandmother, Sarah Westfall, was buried in Section 13 on a plot purchased by Sarah's son-in-law, William P. Skerrett. William had owned a mortuary in Detroit. William's wife, Addie Coleman Skerrett, was a sister to our Grandpa Roy.

When we found Lot 202, I was surprised that there were no headstones for Addie, William, or Sarah. The only marker was a headstone for Ruth Skerrett, a child of Addie and William who died as an infant in 1900.

We later went to the cemetery office and verified that Great Grandma Sarah was buried in grave #2 of Lot 202. But the records showed her as Sarah Penton. Born with the last name of Westfall, she had become Sarah Coleman when she married Calvert Coleman. After she divorced Calvert and married James Renton, she became Sarah Renton. James died in 1918. Apparently through a clerical error at the time of burial, the cemetery incorrectly listed her as Sarah Penton. We had them make a notation of the error on their records.

We then began our search for the grave of Jennie Coleman Freer, a sister to our Grandpa Roy. Jennie had married Edgar Freer. The couple adopted Roy's daughter Ruth shortly after Roy's wife died. Although cemetery records show Edgar and Jennie buried in graves #2 and #3 of lot 83 in Section 2-A, neither of them have a headstone or other grave marker.



Having concluded our visit to Woodlawn Cemetery, Larry and I drove to Mount Olivet Cemetery on the east side of Detroit. We were searching for the graves of relatives on our mother's side of the family. From prior experience, we knew that her father, Frank Steil, and his parents were buried there. We also knew that her mother, Catherine Lukaschewski Steil, and Catherine's parents Rudolph and Anna had graves there too.

I was most interested in finding the grave of Louise Lukaschewski since I had never seen it before or, if I had, I had not realized that, as the mother of Rudolph Lukaschewski, she was my Great Great Grandmother. I was also hoping that we would find the grave of

Rudolph's brother Albert Lukaschewski and his wife Matilda. It is through Albert and Matilda that we are related to Michelle Lukaschewski, someone I recently found through Facebook. Michelle is the Great Great Granddaughter of Albert and Matilda.



2nd Great Grandma Louise was born in Poland in 1822.

With some persistence, Larry and I finally found the Steil plots and the Lukaschewski plots. We took photos of the headstones and did some video taping as we read biographical scripts at some of the headstones.

With our day of cemetery visits having come to an end, we headed back to Larry and Ann's house to prepare for a gathering that would occur there in the evening. Larry would be the first person I would interview during this family history tour. I had invited all of our siblings to come to dinner and to attend the interview. We were also hoping to meet a newly-found cousin, Christopher Coleman. Chris is the son of Duffy Coleman, the grandson of Dodd Coleman, and the great grandson of Arthur Roy Coleman.

Attending this event was my brother Gary and his wife Camille, my sister Diane and her husband Ray, my sister Carolyn, Larry's fiancé Ann, and our cousin Christopher. The interview went very well.

As with all of the oral histories that I took during the Family History Tour, the interview of Larry was recorded as an audio file as well as a digital video file.



Diane, Chris, Tom, Gary, Larry, and Carolyn

On Thursday, April 14, Larry and I drove to St. Clair Shores for an interview with Dorothy Storz. Born as Dorothy Steil, she is one of the oldest living members of the Steil family. Dorothy's father was George Steil, the brother of our grandfather, Frank W. Steil. Dorothy and our mother Kay were first cousins.



Dorothy Storz in her living room with Tom Coleman

The interview was arranged by our cousin, Ken Steil. We were fortunate that even though her husband Jim had passed away only a few weeks before, Dorothy was willing to do the interview. Dorothy's son Mark, who lives in Cleveland, was able to be there too.

Dorothy shared many memories of her youth, telling us stories about her parents, grandparents, and various aunts and uncles. On display in her living room was a dollhouse she built when she was 80 years old. "I always wanted a dollhouse," Dorothy told us. "It is never too late to enjoy things in life, regardless of your age."

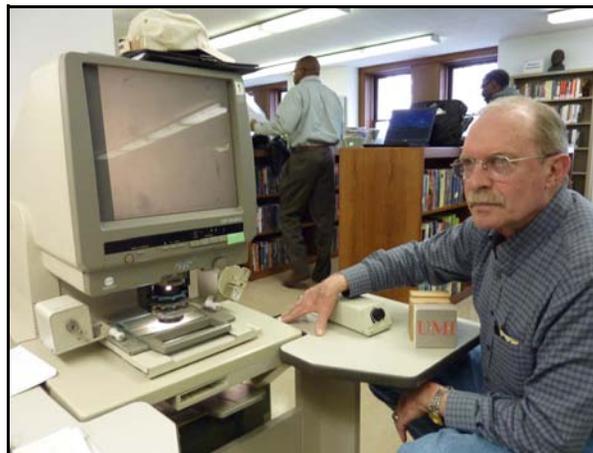
When we finished the interview with Dorothy, Larry and I followed Ken to his house where his wife Diane had prepared a lunch for us. We were joined by Jim and Beverly Fry. Jim's mother Ellen was our mother's first cousin. His grandmother, Anna Steil, was the sister of our grandfather Frank. Anna married John Ladensack.



Jim spoke about the Anna branch of the Steil family

On Friday, April 15, Larry and I went to the main building of the Detroit Public Library on the campus of Wayne State University. The library has a large collection, on microfilm, of issues of the Detroit News dating back to the 1800s.

We had some specific tasks in mind: (1) find a death notice for our Great Great Grandfather John P. Steil; (2) see if there was a news story about the traffic accident that killed Jean Coleman, the sister of our father, when she was a child; and (3) look for a death record for our Grandpa Roy. We succeeded with all three tasks.



Larry Coleman at the Detroit Public Library

Although we found a death notice for John P. Steil, it did not contain any information about where he was buried. Since he was not buried at Mount Olivet like many other Steil relatives, we would have to continue our search for his grave through other sources.

But we really lucked out when it came to Jean Coleman. On the front page of section two of the Detroit News we found a story about several auto accidents that occurred on Sunday, August 5, 1923. The story mentioned that Jean Coleman, then six years old, was hit by a car and was in the hospital with internal injuries. Cemetery records show that she died on August 6. We also found a death notice for Arthur Roy Coleman showing that he died on January 2, 1932.

When we were done with the library research, Larry drove me to the home of my sister Diane where I stayed for the next three nights.

On Saturday, April 16, my brother-in-law Steve Skalnek chauffeured Carolyn, Diane and I to Carsonville where I was scheduled to interview our aunt, Betty Basler, at the home of our cousin Connie and her husband Larry Panduren and Connie's daughter Lisa. Cousin Charles and his wife Jane were there, as were Cousin John and his son Jeff, his daughter Julie and her husband Dennis. My brother Larry and his fiancé Ann, my sister Diane, my sister Carolyn and her husband Steve were there too.

Aunt Betty was in great form. She looked wonderful and, as usual, had a terrific sense of humor. With funny one-

liners interspersed throughout the interview, she had the whole group laughing from start to finish.

Prior to the interview, Connie brought out an old family photo album. Many of the photos were from Aunt Betty's early childhood, with pictures of her brother Murray and sister Jean, her parents, and her maternal grandparents.

As the interview was about to begin, Aunt Betty looked down on a plate of oatmeal cookies on the table in front of her. Just as she started to reach for one, her daughter Connie suggested that she should wait until after the interview was done to have a cookie. As she picked up a cookie and bit into it anyway, Aunt Betty responded: "Don't worry about me, I'm just fine."



Aunt Betty and her son Charles at the kitchen table

When the interview was finished, everyone went out to lunch at a restaurant in Port Sanilac.

On Monday, April 18, my sisters Carolyn and Diane went with me to Belleville and Ypsilanti. In Belleville, we visited Hillside and Otisville cemeteries.



Westfall family grave marker at Otisville Cemetery

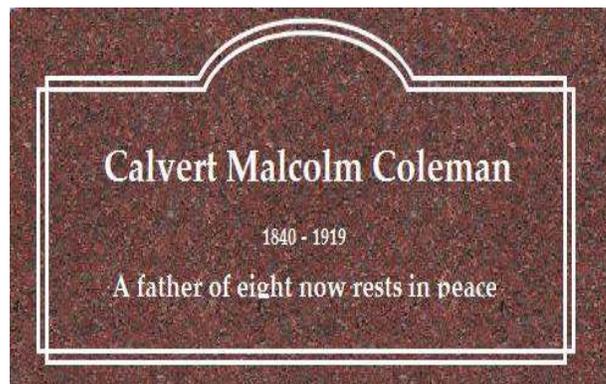
Following instructions from Clarice Coleman, we found the grave marker for Samuel Westfall and Elizabeth Kipp in the Otisville Cemetery. The marker was just as she

had described it: an obelisk topped by an urn.

Samuel and Elizabeth were the parents of our great grandmother, Sarah Elizabeth Westfall. We also paid our respects at the gravesite of Sarah's grandfather (our 3rd great grandfather) Walter Kipp. Walter was born in New York in 1776. He died in Belleville in 1846.

A few miles away, we stopped at Hillside Cemetery. Our top priority was to find the section in which our great grandfather, Calvert Malcolm Coleman, was buried. Again, instructions from Clarice Coleman guided us to the general location where Calvert had been buried in 1919.

Although Calvert's grave is unmarked, cemetery records and historical information suggest that he was buried in Lot 530, a plot purchased by James Pullen for burying single individuals. Pullen, an undertaker, had been a friend of Calvert's for many years. When Calvert died at the Eloise Infirmary, Pullen took pity on his friend and, since no family members stepped forward to take charge, he published an obituary and had Calvert buried.



An idea for a marker for Great Grandfather Calvert

After saying a prayer for Calvert, we located the graves of several other Coleman relatives who were buried in another area of the cemetery. We found the graves of Calvert's son George (1870-1946) and George's son George Jr. We also paid respects at the grave of Calvert's son Claud (1875-1915) and Claude's children Clarence, Sumner, Beatrice, and Alger.



Great Grandmother Sarah deserves a marker too

As I was writing this summary of the Family History Tour, I had a vision that someday our great grandparents, Calvert and Sarah, will each have a grave marker.

When we finished with our cemetery visits, Carolyn, Diane and I headed for Ypsilanti where we were scheduled for a lunch and an interview at the home of Leslie and Marilyn Coleman. At 88, Leslie is the oldest living member of the Samuel Coleman branch of the family of Calvert and Sarah Coleman. Leslie was the son of Samuel. Samuel was a brother to my Grandpa Roy, which makes Leslie my first cousin once removed.

Also attending the lunch and interview were Leslie's daughter Sandra Jean and her husband Charles Sofios. The daughter of Leslie and Marilyn, Nancy Lynn Kowalski, was there too, as was Leslie's niece, Barbara Bureau. We all got acquainted during lunch which was served in the family room.

After lunch, we moved to the living room where the interview of Leslie and Marilyn was conducted. Leslie had an excellent memory of events from his childhood. Marilyn told stories about dating Leslie and of their life together as husband and wife. Nancy and Sandy chimed in from time to time, adding interesting tidbits to the narrative.



Leslie and Marilyn Coleman in their living room

Everyone was moved when Barbara recalled how, after 30 years of wondering about her father, Kenneth Coleman, she embarked on a search for him and they were finally reunited. Kenneth is a son of Samuel Coleman's first marriage while Leslie is a child of Samuel's second marriage.

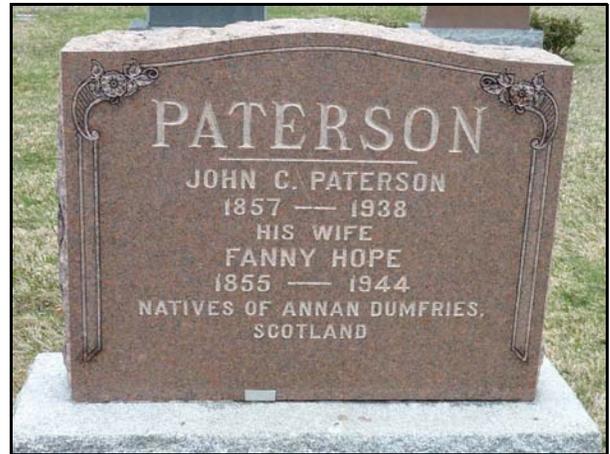
After we returned to Lake Orion, I said goodbye to Diane and then spent the next three nights at the home of my sister Carolyn and her husband Steve.

The next day, April 19, Carolyn drove me to Chatham, Ontario. We left Detroit and crossed the Ambassador Bridge over the Detroit River, arriving in Windsor about 11 a.m. We reached Chatham about an hour later.

William and Eve Stacey live in a beautiful home on the Thames River. William is the son of Bert and Mabel Stacey. William's mother was born as Mabel Paterson, the daughter of John Paterson and Fanny Hope and the

sister of our paternal grandmother, Margaret Paterson.

Since we arrived in Chatham a little earlier than planned, Carolyn and I went first to Maple Leaf Cemetery to visit the graves of our great grandparents, John Paterson and Fanny Hope. John and Fanny were born in Scotland and immigrated to Canada where they married and raised their family.



The Paterson family has deep roots in Scotland

When we arrived at the home of the Staceys, Bill and Eve greeted us and then introduced us to their son Robert and their nephew Richard. Richard had driven down from Sarnia. Richard is the son of William's sister, Bernice. William and Bernice were first cousins to our father.



Robert, Eve, and Bill Stacey, with Richard Fletcher

We looked over some family photos, had lunch, and then conducted the interview of Bill in the dining room. Bill was full of stories about his cousins Murray and Dodd and his uncle Roy. Murray and he were "best friends" when they were young. Dodd was an extremely handsome young man. And Roy way a real character.

He recalled how his Uncle Roy would drive up to their farmhouse in a fancy car, all the while smoking a big cigar. Apparently, Roy would smuggle booze back to Detroit during the prohibition.

Roy must have caught the attention of the authorities since, according to Bill, the FBI once came to the door of Roy and Margaret in the middle of the night at their apartment on Woodward and Six Mile. Margaret stalled them while Roy snuck out the back door, ran down the alley, and rode a streetcar down to the foot of Woodward where he took the ferry boat back to Canada.

When the interview of the Staceys was over, we took photos and then Carolyn and I headed back to Michigan. I slept quite well on Tuesday night, feeling a sense of accomplishment since most of the activities planned for the Family History Tour had occurred as anticipated.

On Wednesday, I drove to Detroit to take photos of headstones I had forgotten to take when we were at Mount Olivet Cemetery the previous week. I also decided to do a little more research to see if I could find the gravesite of our great great grandfather, John Peter Steil.

John was born in Germany in 1828. He married Anna Ruhl and they had seven children, including George who became the father of our Grandpa Frank. George was the first of the Steil family to immigrate to America. Two years later, in 1882, his brother Valentine immigrated to Detroit too. They were followed by their father, John, who came to Detroit with his wife and other four children in 1884.

I knew that John Steil was not buried in Mount Olivet, nor was Valentine. I had learned that John and his family lived at 874 Mount Elliott for several years. So I drove by that location. The lot was vacant, but across the street was a old cemetery. I went to the office and spoke with someone, but he could not find a record for John Steil. He suggested that I find John's death certificate which might disclose where he had been buried.

I drove to Herman Kiefer Hospital in midtown Detroit where one can obtain copies of vital records such as birth and death certificates. I filled out a request form and was told that someone would call me in a few days to let me know if they found a death certificate for John Steil.

I then drove to 29 Geneva Avenue in Highland Park. I looked for the house where Jenny Coleman Freer had lived in 1922 – the house where Great Grandma Sarah had died. It was less than two blocks from the apartment where my dad, his sisters, and their parents had lived at that time. Unfortunately, the house had been torn down.

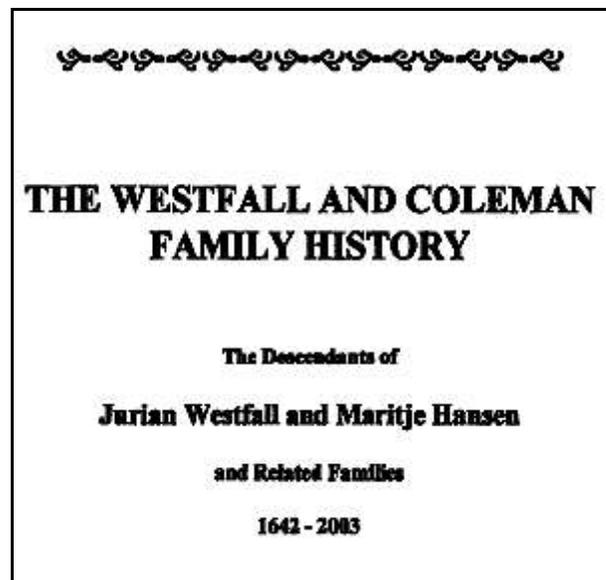
My time was running out. I had to get back to Lake Orion since I had invited my siblings to meet me at Eastlawn Cemetery, the place where our parents are buried. I wanted this gathering at their graves to be the last event on the Family History Tour.

Carolyn and I drove there at 7 p.m. Gary, Diane, Larry, and Cathy were there waiting for us. We greeted each other, talked a bit about our parents, said a prayer, and took some photos at the headstone of their joint grave. My mission was complete.



Carolyn, Cathy, Larry, Diane, Tom, and Gary at our parent's gravesite

The next day I flew back to Los Angeles. On the plane I had an opportunity to review a 161-page book titled "The Westfall and Coleman Family History." It was published by Clarice Koester Coleman in 2003. Clarice is the wife of Robert Coleman. Robert is a grandson of Claud Coleman, who was a brother of our Grandpa Roy.



Clarice Coleman published this masterpiece in 2003

Clarice has been researching Coleman family history for decades and this book was the culmination of her work. In addition to dates and locations of births, deaths, and marriages for hundreds of relatives, it also contains short stories about their lives. The more I read, the more impressed I was with the outstanding work she has done.

A few weeks after I was home, I got a call from Herman Keifer Hospital. A clerk had located the death certificate for John P. Steil. I asked her to share one piece of information with me. Did it show where he was buried? Yes, it listed the place of burial as "German Lutheran."

That rang a bell with me. I had previously found two death certificates on the Internet for children of John Steil and Anna Ruhl. One was for their son Valentine. The other for their daughter Katherine. They too were buried at "German Lutheran." Today it is known as Trinity Cemetery. So on my next visit to Michigan, I know I will be visiting that cemetery to pay respect to my Great Great Grandfather, John Steil, and any of his family members who may be buried there too.

Within a few days of receiving this information on John Steil, I got an email message from Renee Steil-Sandoval. She is a descendent of Valentine Steil, who was a son of John P. Steil. I had found Renee through Facebook. Renee supplied me with a dozen or so names of living relatives in the Valentine branch of the Steil family. So the family tree keeps growing. It now has 1901 entries.



Oral history interviews were captured on video

Now that I am home and have had time to review the events of the Family History Tour, I will be uploading materials online at colemanfamilywebsite.com. In addition to this summary, a new section will contain photos of each of the events, digital audio files of each of the interviews, and video footage which can be downloaded for later viewing or ordered as a dvd disc.

A little more than a year ago, our knowledge of the ancestors and relatives of our parents was quite limited. We had little information about the Lukaschewskis. We were not aware that our Grandpa Roy had eight siblings, much less that we had dozens of living Coleman cousins, many of whom reside about an hour from Lake Orion.

We did not have contact with members of the Paterson family for decades. Our connection with the family of our dad's half brother, Dodd Coleman, had been severed around 1970 and we had no hope of reconnecting with them. Our only significant relationship with the Steil

family was through seeing Ken and Diane Steil at our biannual Coleman family reunion.

Through my family history research all that has changed. Ken brought some Steils to our last reunion. Larry and I met with some other Steils during the Family History Tour. Mom's cousin, Dorothy, expressed an interest in keeping contact with our family. Let's make that happen.

I found our cousin, Chris Coleman, through Facebook. Hopefully, he will be invited and will attend Coleman family events in the future. His dad, Duffy, is having ongoing phone communications with our brother Dan.

Last year, Carolyn and Diane and I went to the reunion of descendents of Samuel Coleman where we met dozens of Coleman cousins. Hopefully, other members of the Murray Coleman family will find time to attend the Samuel Coleman family reunion on August 20, 2011.

While my outreach to Michelle Lukaschewski has not yet resulted in a face-to-face meeting with her and some of her family, perhaps that will happen someday. I am sending this summary to her hoping she will share it with her mother, siblings, and other Lukaschewski relatives.

Aunt Betty and her cousin Bernice Stacey used to communicate on a regular basis. They have not seen each other in years, even though they live only about 30 miles apart – with Bernice in Sarnia just across from Port Huron, and Betty a few miles north in Port Sanilac. Perhaps someone in the Basler or Stacey families will arrange for a reunion of the two cousins very soon.

Someday I would like to meet Bob and Clarice Coleman in person. They live in Longmont, Colorado, which is not far from Boulder. Michael and I have visited that area twice now in the last two years. If we are make another trip to Colorado, I would like to meet Bob and Clarice in person.

One specific invitation I am making to members of the extended Coleman families – especially the descendents of Roy, Samuel, and Claud – is to donate money to purchase headstones for the graves of our great grandparents, Calvert Coleman and Sarah Westfall. It will only cost about \$250 per marker. If people made donations of \$10 or more for this purpose, a headstone could be placed at their gravesites by the end of 2011. This is a modest request considering the fact that, without them, most of us would not be here today. Please contact me if you would like to make such a donation.

I end this summary by expressing my appreciation for and pride in our family heritage which, for many of us, is Irish, Scottish, German, and Polish.

In closing, I send my love and best wishes to all.

Thomas F. Coleman
(818) 482-4485
tomcoleman@earthlink.net