

## GENEALOGY—PROFESSION OR HOBBY?

By MRS. MARGARET BIRDSONG PRICE\*

The subject of genealogy is far from being a new one, but many people are new to genealogy. However, during the past fifteen or twenty years general interest in the subject has increased at an amazing rate. It no longer is a subject pursued by a few mildly interested individuals who used it as a "filler-in" for leisure hours, it has become generally recognized as a subject not only of intrinsic interest, but also an indispensable auxiliary of history. Those who are seriously engaged in genealogical research become aware of this fact as they follow necessary methods of research which require knowledge of social, economic and cultural trends and patterns. While retracing the steps of their progenitors genealogists are retracing history as it was being made. People are the object of their search, and people make history.

The North Carolina State Library has a splendid genealogical collection of approximately 4,000 items. With a few exceptions, such as the early newspapers and the U. S. Census records (1800-1880), which are on microfilm, this collection consists of secondary material — books which have been compiled as a result of research in primary records. When the library was reorganized two years ago a special collection was made of all basic genealogical materials in the library, and a separate area has been provided to house this collection. This innovation was specifically made to meet the need of increasing interest in the subject, and to make the collection more usable and convenient to those engaging in this form of research. Every item in this collection is now easily accessible, and the researcher is at liberty to browse at will among the books. Browsing often brings rewarding results for catalog cards cannot indicate specific details of any book.

It is the policy of the library not to duplicate the purchase of genealogical items. Since this collection as a rule contains only one copy of a book, and since the books in the collection are expensive (in many cases being out of print and irreplaceable) it has been necessary to adopt the policy of making all items unavailable for either personal or inter-library loan.

The library is not sufficiently staffed to do full line tracings, but a limited research is made in the materials available in an effort to answer all queries whether they are presented in person or by mail. While full line tracing is prohibitive, there are very few instances in which information on some portion of a request cannot be given. In genealogical research even a faintest clue may result in solving a lineal problem that has bothered the researcher for months and even years.

Photostating facilities are not available at the library, but for the convenience of patrons desiring photostats of coats-of-arms and other materials arrangements can be made to have the work done by a commercial firm at the patron's expense.

For persons who wish to have lines traced by a professional genealogist a mimeographed list of the names and addresses of available genealogists in North Carolina is furnished upon request. In submitting this list the North Carolina State Library assumes no responsibility for either the quality of the work or the manner in which it is performed by the genealogist employed by the patron.

Genealogical research can be a most engaging and interesting pursuit. The unfolding of one's lineage generation by generation is satisfying and exciting. It is not an easy form of research, and is often a prolonged one, so an abundance of patience and determination are prerequisites for successful results. In an article appearing in an

\*Mrs. Price is Genealogy Reference Librarian, The State Library, Raleigh.

## NORTH CAROLINA LIBRARIES

---

issue of the DAR Magazine one writer commented that "Genealogy is no hobby for an ignoramus." This may be an over-emphasized statement of the fact, but it is true that the very nature of the search for previous generations presupposes an elementary knowledge, at least, of the history of our own country, and, ultimately, of the history of the country from which the ancestors came. This statement is not intended to be foreboding nor discouraging to those who might have the first glimmer of interest in the subject. Actually, genealogical research can be undertaken, and often successfully, by anyone who is sufficiently interested. Once it gets into the blood, so to speak, there is no letting up. It becomes a challenge to the curiosity and interest of those who engage in it.

To those who refrain from beginning the long, tedious hunt for obscure ancestors for fear of finding the proverbial horse thief hanging from the family tree, the following poem which was published in the *Saturday Evening Post* for November 17, 1941, is cited by way of encouragement and solace:

It's nice to come from gentle folk who wouldn't stop to drawl,  
Who never took a lusty poke at anyone at all,  
Who never raised a raucous shout at any Country Inn,  
Or calmed an ugly fellow lout with a belaying pin,  
Who never shot a revenuer hunting for the still,  
Who never rustled cattle, who're pleased with Uncle's will,  
Who lived their lives out as they ought with no uncouth distractions,  
And shunned like leprosy the thought of taking legal action.  
It's nice to come from gentle folk who've never known disgrace,  
But oh, though Scandal is no joke; IT'S EASIER TO TRACE.

---