



PAF Express

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A Birds-eye View Of Genealogy

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Strangers tend to slow down as they drive down my street these days. They're wondering why my neighbors and I are craning our necks and gazing at so intently in the sky and in the trees. "It's a bird." "It's a plane." "No, it's Underdog!"

Actually, it's not Underdog; it really is a bird. A family, or families (we haven't seen their family tree), of "Monk parakeets" has adopted our neighborhood as their new home and they've captured my interest, as well as that of several of my neighbors. At least once a day I'm out there scanning the trees looking for my green-feathered friends. I keep camera and binoculars within close reach so that I can better see and photograph my new pals as they come to dine at my bird feeders. When I see my neighbors, we compare notes on them. They have, in short, become an obsession. (This is familiar territory for me.)

So what are Monk parakeets? Native to South America, these birds were imported to be sold as pets in the 1960s. Released both intentionally and unintentionally, there are now colonies in a number of states, and the colonies in the Chicago metropolitan area have been featured on newscasts and are noted for their ability to stand Chicago winters, which as an area native, I can tell you is no small feat! They are nonnatives to the U.S. that have acclimated themselves and despite obstacles survived. Sound familiar? Yes (you knew it was coming), they remind me in some ways of my immigrant ancestors. In learning more about these birds I've found some other parallels that I thought I'd explore in this week's column.

IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS In the winter they're easy to spot, their green plumage a bright reminder of spring against the stark backdrop of snow and barren trees. In the summer, seeking them out takes a bit more work, as they tend to blend in with all the greenery. However, they have a distinctive squawk that is easy to identify and when I hear it, it's much easier to find them.

While our ancestors may seem to blend in with their surroundings at times, they too have identifiers that make them easier to pick out. If you're having a tough time spotting your ancestors, put together a profile of that ancestor that includes some of the characteristics that set him or her apart from their surroundings. These identifiers can include:

- Addresses
- Unusual given or middle names
- Other family members
- Age (exact or estimated)
- Occupation
- Place of birth
- Parents' place(s) of birth
- Race
- Other family members

The names of associates (Friend, neighbors, and extended family may be referenced in various records as sponsors, guardians, witnesses, etc.), Religion, Military Service, and Property.

Since property was often passed down from generation to generation, a family can often be traced through property holdings. Signature. A comparison of your ancestor's signature on separate records can help ascertain if you are looking at the same person.

Where's The Nest?

Monk parakeet nests are easy to spot once you know where they are at because they can be quite large. They build their nest of sticks (a characteristic unique to monks, as opposed to other species of parrots). I have no idea where our monks are nesting, but by observing their comings and goings and listening for their chatter, I am hoping to get a clue as to the nest whereabouts.

We often have to use the same tactic of following our ancestors through various records and years to find out where they lived. Those of you who have been reading this column for any length of time know that I'm a big fan of city directories when it comes to searching for my ancestors. The fact that they were typically printed yearly allows you to track a family year by year. Knowing their whereabouts at a particular time can lead to religious, cemetery, land, and other records. In addition, the addresses and occupational information that is typically included can also help you to identify your ancestor, when there is more than one person in the record group sharing that name.

Where Did They Come From?

The website for the Institute of Biological Invasions (<http://invasions.bio.utk.edu/invaders/monk.html>) tells me that the monks are native "exclusively in lowlands east of the Andes from Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay, and southern Brazil south to the Patagonia region of Argentina."

I was fortunate in having located the town origins for my Kelly ancestors through a website. I found them in the Emigrant Savings Bank records recently posted here on Ancestry.com, but in other cases I haven't been that fortunate. Some records that can include information as to the origins of our ancestors include:

Home sources and family members. Typically the easiest to find, they are also sometimes the most overlooked. Diaries, correspondence, newspaper clippings, photos, scrapbooks, bibles, handed-down recipes, heirlooms, and other mementos may hold clues so be sure to go over them thoroughly. My greatgrandfather's town of origin was first noted on the back of a photograph from my grandma's cousin. And don't forget to ask family members if they have any information. People are our most fragile sources when it comes to family history. Naturalization and alien registrations. Your best bet with these is in the case of post 1906 records. Pre-1906 records typically only list the country of origin.

Obituaries. Check various papers in all areas in which your ancestor lived and died. Often obituaries of people who had moved away were picked up and copied by the hometown papers. Check as many papers as possible, and for subsequent days. Where a newspaper might only pick up the bare essentials regarding services, subsequent issues or newspapers with better access to family information may include a much more comprehensive obituary that includes information about nativity.

Cemetery records. (Unless of course you're my ancestors, who clearly thought that just the name on the headstone was enough information.)

Death certificates. Again, these will vary in terms of how much information. While some may only include the state or country of birth, others may be more detailed.

Census records. While most will only include the state or county, in 1920, because of WWI border changes, enumerators were asked to require more specific information for respondents with origins in some countries,

including Germany, AustriaHungary, Russia, or Turkey.

Military records.

Passenger lists. Again, later immigrants will likely have more information than those prior to 1900.

To Sum Up . . .

As I searched for more information on these birds, my appreciation for them has grown. Although in many areas they are considered pests because of perceived risk to agriculture, I can't help but wonder at their ability to successfully make their home in places so foreign to them. Our immigrant ancestors were often unwelcome in their new environment as well, but they overcame these obstacles and their courage created for us the life that we enjoy today.

For More Information on Monk Parakeets:

Monk (Quaker) Parakeets in North America:

<http://www.monkparakeet.com/>

Monk Parrots in the Wild:

[<http://www.monkparrots.com/>](http://www.monkparrots.com/)

The Monk Parakeet Invader of the Month, December 2000<<http://invasions.bio.utk.edu/invaders/monk.html>

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