

[Wilkes-Barre Record, Jan. 11, 1896.]

PEDIGREE BUILDING.

MEETING OF THE WYOMING HISTORICAL AND GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY.

One of the informal meetings of the Wyoming Historical Society was held Friday evening. Rev. Dr. Jones, vice president, occupied the chair and there was a large attendance. The address of the evening was by Dr. William H. Egle, State librarian, and one of the most prominent and assiduous genealogical students of the country. His subject was "Pedigree Building" and it was listened to with the greatest interest. Dr. Egle attached great importance to knowing the genealogy of one's immediate family, though frequently great difficulties are encountered and tangled family threads check the enthusiasm of the tyro and discourage him in his task. If in the first instance we knew the date of the arrival in America of the first ancestor and had town records showing the marriages, births and deaths down to the eighth generation it would be easy, but not so easy to trace back a family who do not know the names of their grandparents on both sides. To successfully accomplish the preparation of the record of any one family requires not only love for the work but a perseverance and an intuitive knowledge which but few possess.

Family pride, pure and simple, is a thing which a great many Americans would feel some shame in acknowledging. And, yet, one has only to watch American public life a short time to see that family connections play an important part in affairs and to perceive that a large share of the public men of to-day are descended from, or related to, the public men of yesterday. You may consider it pride or not, but everything which pertains to one's own family should be carefully recorded and preserved for the benefit of those who are to follow after. He who collects and keeps his own family history, is not only a benefactor in his

way, but will receive the blessings of future generations. These records should be piously guarded, and if possible preserved permanently, and I am glad to note the increased interest taken everywhere in this particular subject.

Thirty years ago when I commenced gathering up material of the history, biography and genealogy of Pennsylvania, I was asked time and again, what I meant, as no body wanted such information. But our people had to be educated to it, and to-day, the demands come from all sections of our American Union, requesting certain genealogical information. It is wonderful what a step forward our American people have taken in this respect, and, this great desire does not come alone from that class which a correspondent twenty-five years ago denominated as "old maids who had nothing else to do," but I have inquiries from all the professions, from the judge on the bench to the Senator in Congress. And here let me offer my meed of praise to those noble women of uncertain age who can always be depended upon for accuracy and assistance in pedigree building. From them I have received more aid than from all other members of any one family put together for reliable and important data.

There are three motives for pedigree building:

First—Search for a noble ancestry.

Secondly—Fortune hunting.

Thirdly—Laudable desire to preserve the family history.

It may possibly surprise you to learn that of a work relating to the "Royal Ancestry" of American citizens, the compiler pocketed \$30,000—a large sum truly, for people to pay for snobbery; and those who assisted in adding to the coffers of one who catered to their "royal" pride no doubt begin to realize how little trouble there was in the make-up of their royal descent. When in every large city of the Union there are dealers in stationery, who will manufacture coats of arms for the royal Four Hundred for decoration on card, carriage and plate, it is not surprising that there are hundreds of people who are thus willing to give a large sum of money for any work which traces back their lineage to some crowned head

be he white, black or Indian. It is not difficult to do this kind of work, but no honest genealogist will engage in it. Carefully examining the record of these Americans of royal "scent," it will be found that all of the intermediate generations are without dates. In fact the descent is far-fetched. It is such work as this which brings genealogy into disrepute and ridicule. If I had the time, I could show my hearers, and prove to them conclusively how easy it is to build up the spurious pedigree of all of them, so that they too might culminate in the person of a debauched monarch, a dozen centuries ago.

Another class are the seekers after wealth. Some of these have heard that a fortune was awaiting them in Europe, and all that was necessary was to properly prove their descent. Every now and then we read in the newspapers that millions of dollars are awaiting claimants, in England, Ireland and Germany, and at once the genealogist is besieged by persons having the same name who are desirous of securing their share of the fortune. It is wonderful to what lengths these people go, and I presume there is no country in the world where people are so easily duped and defrauded as in the United States. The reason therefor is the greed of gain and the desire to become suddenly rich. All these reports of fortunes are arrant frauds, and not a dollar has ever come to claimants in this country.

There may be some who sneer at pedigree building, but there is a wide difference between the laudable work of gathering up and preserving the record of your family and the hunting for fortunes or the snobbish efforts of establishing one's self as an American of royal descent. You see there are two classes of pedigree hunters which disgust, one hunting for fortunes, the other for blood royal. It is wonderful to what lengths these people go, it is their dream by night and their theme by day. True blood is better than to be a descendant of a royal house through a morganatic alliance. "Tafel-faehig" is the pride of the German, and purity of lineage outranks the titles which a sovereign may confer.

That class of people who are worthy of emulation—deserving of unstinted praise—are they who with the pious motive of preserving the record of their ancestry, gather up the precious threads of genealogical wool they may find scattered here and there, and without inordinate vanity weave them into a continuous story of family history,—honorable in the beginning—in the patriotism of a long line of God-fearing and estimable men and women. They seek not descent from a debauched monarch, or an inheritance to a mythical fortune. They are to be honored for what they have done, and to be admired for their loving and patriotic work which will live long among family annals, free from the self-aggrandizement of royal descent and the taint of cupidity—when these shall have been discarded and ignored by their former devotees.

Build your pedigree well; place little reliance upon tradition, yet it may furnish you clues to facts, and these are what you want in pedigree building.

Beware of the three brothers theory, and be satisfied that there is but one head of the family, concerning whom you propose to prepare a record. Neither say that your ancestor came over on the Mayflower or on the Welcome with William Penn, unless you have positive authority, for, as the list of passengers on both those vessels is known, you may make a mistake. It is sad to think of how many ancestors came over on these vessels, for were this true both of these vessels would have gone to the bottom long before they reached midocean. Do not claim too much. Secure the facts and place them on record.

Dr. Egle interspersed his too brief address with incidents showing the humorous side of the search for pedigrees and closed with the hope that some one would prepare a genealogy of the early settlers of "this grandly historic" Wyoming Valley, as he termed it.

The speaker exhibited a family record in German, printed at Ephrata, Pa., in 1763, being the first printed family record extant.