



## Back/Bach Genealogical Society

# Descendant News

Volume 5, No. 2

November 1998

## Memorable Mountain Reunion

More than a hundred Back/Bach descendants and their families, representing eleven states, came together for a memorable October reunion in the heart of the Appalachian mountains. Whitesburg, Kentucky, at the foot of Pine Mountain, provided a beautiful seasonal setting.

On Friday evening, Oct. 9th, the "cousins" met informally at Pine Mountain Grill to greet old and new friends and share a meal. This new family-style restaurant, with a large private banquet and meeting room, was a great place to meet and the hospitality was excellent.

On Saturday, Oct. 10th, many took the Ancestral Tour. The sights included every geologist's dream, the cut in the Pound Gap rock formation, plus the Jenkins Coal Museum and the Begley Museum (C.B. Caudill Store). After the Begley Museum, a pioneer lunch was served on the grounds of the Old Indian Bottom Church.

The pioneer lunch included a roasted pig, done by Jim Haynes and Ray Back, soup beans cooked over a open fire by Richard Smith, an old-

fashioned stack cake baked by Hattie Stewart, "stack" gingerbread baked by Beulah Back, and many delicious dishes made by others, including the Daughters of the South.

After lunch, three couples renewed their wedding vows inside the old church — with the brides in hoop skirt dresses and the bridegrooms in Confederate uniforms. The ceremony was conducted by the Rev. Tom Curry in the historical setting befitting our ancestors.

The next stop was the Whitaker Cemetery on Kentucky Highway 7, for a ceremony conducted by members of the local chapter of the Sons of the Confederate Veterans. Among the veter-

erans buried in the cemetery is Henry Back Jr., who served in the War of 1812. He and his wife later settled on Rockhouse Creek in Letcher County, not far from the cemetery. Members of our Society purchased a plaque honoring Henry Back Jr. and placed it at the base of the flag pole. A replica of the 15-star American flag that was used during the War of 1812 was raised by a descendant, Dr. Reedus Back.

— continued inside —



*"A wonderful day, remembering, seeing, learning and discovering. I truly felt like I was with a bunch of cousins."*

### **INSIDE:**

*Membership Roster  
Regional Volunteers  
Genealogy Updates  
Series, Part II:*

*Ancestral Family in  
Colonial America*

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*Represents and promotes the Society; oversees general operations; collects, reviews and edits genealogical data; responds to general inquiries; and acts as meeting host.*

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*Processes memberships; maintains database, mailing lists; promotes membership growth; handles routine correspondence and computer communications; publishes and distributes materials.*

# HISTORY

*Second of a Series*

## **Our Ancestral Family in Colonial America: A Continuing Look**

*by Reedus Back*

The following is a continuation of the article in the June 1998 issue of the *Descendant News*. This continuing look will consider two defining factors — literacy and slavery. The manner in which the early German-Americans responded to these factors revealed attitudes and beliefs that further define them as a people. As previously stated, since our smaller Back/Bach ancestral family unit was an integral part of that larger group, a reasonable assumption is that the smaller unit would reflect some of the beliefs and attitudes of the larger group.

A brief examination of the issue of literacy among the early German-Americans reveals an important characteristic of them as a people. Their positive attitude toward education may be traced to the German educational culture that the immigrants brought with them, held onto, and passed down to their children. A study of the history of education reveals that Germany has been, from early times, a world leader in this field. That strong belief in the worth of education was inherent in the early German-American settlers. Consequently, as a group, they were a literate people at a time when many Americans were not.

Evidence that so few were illiterate may be found in the agreement, made in 1786 between the Lutherans and Reformed religious groups, to build a jointly owned church building. Of the forty-eight men who signed the agreement,

only four made marks for their signature. (The German Element of the Shenandoah Valley, J.W. Wayland, p.134)

The early German-Americans' positive attitude toward education and the high rate of literacy among them tend to explain their almost universal desire to educate their children. Their strong belief that this responsibility laid with the family, not the public, led them to be effective leaders in establishing private primary schools, academies, technical institutions, seminaries, normal schools and colleges. The immigrants' great desire to privately educate their young came about, in part, to ensure that the children would be able to read the German Bibles which most families had brought from Germany.

The early German-Americans' reaction to the issue of slavery seems varied, and does not reveal a clear picture of them as a group. Some wills and records show a belief in slavery. For example, the Lutherans purchased slaves to work the 700-acre farm that they acquired when the famous Hebron Church was built. However, it is known that others did oppose slavery. It is not known whether the opposition came from strong moral feelings or from lack of need. Many were skilled workmen, small farmers or traders and did not need help beyond that available from their own large families. There is some evidence that prejudice played a part; they simply did not want to associate with black people.

(Wayland, *op. cit.*, p. 131)

— *To be continued* —



To help make all Back/Bach descendants aware of the Back/Bach Genealogical Society and its purposes, there is a real need for volunteers. A good place to start is to study the enclosed membership directory, then search for names not on the list and invite them to join the Society.

Another regional volunteer has stepped forward; Shirley Back Fowler will represent the Southeast area. *Thanks, Shirley!* Regional contacts are:

#### NEW ENGLAND AREA:

**Karen Back**  
124 The Heights  
Gloucester MA 01930

#### HOUSTON, TEXAS AREA:

**Patrick J. Back**  
12407 Sherman Hills Dr  
Houston TX 77099

#### SOUTHEAST AREA:

**Shirley Back Fowler**  
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## Memorable Reunion *(continued)*

Henry Back III, son of Henry Back Jr., is one of the six Civil War veterans in the cemetery. He was honored by a plaque and a battle flag, purchased by the Sons of the Confederate Veterans, Benjamin Caudill Camp No. 1629. Honors were also paid to veterans of all wars who are buried in the Whitaker Cemetery.

On Saturday evening, the descendants formally came together at the Pine Mountain Grill for a banquet, followed by an informative and interesting program. The guest speaker was V.N. "Bud" Phillips, author of Coming Down the Cumberland, who inspired everyone present to get involved through all avenues of research to know their ancestry. He spoke about his "magnificent obsession" to learn about his ancestors.

James Gary Back did a superb job as an emcee, keeping the crowd entertained and included in the action. Some talented family members participated in the program, with instrumental music, singing and readings of poetry composed by relatives. Many in the audience shared stories about their ancestors.

The oldest cousin present, 92-year-old Custer Back, came from California with his wife, Janet, to be a part of the weekend.

Custer shared information about their travels.

Here are some comments from those who attended the 5th Annual Family Reunion:

- ♦ *"The tour was fun and the program was really good."*
- ♦ *"A wonderful day, remembering, seeing, learning and discovering. I truly felt like I was with a bunch of cousins."*
- ♦ *"Thanks for the hard work put into the weekend of fun."*
- ♦ *"Best yet, varied, busy."*
- ♦ *"Great meeting, good atmosphere, Letcher County can be proud!"*
- ♦ *"Bigger and better every year—seemed like "just a minute" between Friday and Sunday."*
- ♦ *"Good time, same as every year."*

*Many thanks to the hard-working and well-organized reunion committee, especially to those who had "hands-on" roles, for a perfect weekend reunion!*

## OBITUARIES

The following descendants have passed away since the last issue of the *Descendant News*:

### **Hershel Downing,**

a long-time member and husband of Flo Back Downing.

### **John Verdell Back,**

a past member.

### **Dwayne Buchanan,**

a recent member, died in April 1998.