



A Message From Our New SFA President Jamie R. Swetland Family Reunions: Irreplaceable



As the Family Association enters into a new decade in 2010 it also enters into a new leadership. Many of you may have met me through the years of SFA reunions I have attended. Yet as I step into this new position, I must mention the SFA's gratitude and appreciation for the leadership we have had under Roger E. Swetland, my father. He has been a true inspiration to many members of the SFA as he has been to me throughout my life. He instilled in me the importance of our family name and knowing our family history. He encouraged my interest in our family heritage through stories of our family and reunions he attended in his youth; trips to the Swetland Homestead and to the home of my great-grandfather; and allowing me to read Luke's own story in his original publication.

I will be teaming up with your new vice president, Paul Swetland, who was instrumental in assisting me in setting up the 2009 SFA reunion, and our newsletter editor, Anne Kirby, to bring to you topics we feel are important to the SFA and its members. I desire to lead and inspire the SFA members' interest in their family histories and help them feel valued as part of the Swe(e)/(a)ntland Family Association. For the first newsletter of this decade we will focus on family reunions: How to establish your own family reunion; why family reunions are important; and what made a memorable family reunion for me through various parts of my life.

What makes a great reunion experience for you? Is it the location and what the area has to offer for additional entertainment? Is it the planned activities including speakers of history and ancestors? Is it the people? Or is it the combination of all of these things?

For myself it is all of these things and the new memories that I walk away with. From a very young age I was going to family reunions. Most of these were on my maternal side and there was always a large congregation in attendance for each. I think that attendance figures exceeding 30 and even 40 for just the "under sixteen" age group were

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"So what interests you? We still have time to plan for the next SFA reunion. Tell us what you think!"
—Jamie Swetland

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"The notice of the 1896 reunion began with the words: 'with a view to a better knowledge of our ancestors and more fraternal acquaintance of the family.'"
—Mark W. Swetland

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normal and total attendance figures usually totaled about 150 to 200 people! These were in the days of economic trouble, concerns over the environment and how our industrial age was affecting it; high gas prices, concerns of automotive reliability and miles per gallon. No, it wasn't just yesterday. It was the 1970's! It still amazes me that we always had a large attendance in the basement and yard of a small country church. Everyone was pinching their pennies but when each family brought a small dish to pass, there was more than enough food to feed everyone.

Today we live in a similar world. We still face many of the same economic and environmental concerns. Money is tighter than ever. Even though our autos are smaller, we still struggle to drive vehicles that we can afford to fuel and feel safe in. On the other hand, we have personal computers in nearly every school, library and home. These computers are connected to the World Wide Web, allowing us to access hundreds of thousands of resources for information, history, news, weather, and so much more. Yet now when it comes to getting together for family reunions we see the attendance numbers dwindling to very low levels. I hope our modern society does not dictate the impersonal face of our PC as acceptable for meeting and interfacing with our families.

But what do I remember most from my family reunion experiences? In my youngster days it was playing with my cousins and other children of a similar age. Into my teens I remember the fun stories of our mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers, and even further generations back in time. There was always a story that brought a feeling of nobility followed by another one or two that gave great humility, knowing that no matter what time you live in, people can make some pretty funny mistakes. From more recent reunions I remember the great people I have met and their stories of life and love of life. It saddens me each time I learn of one of those great patriarchs or matriarchs passing from this life into the next.

So what interests you? We still have time to plan for the next SFA reunion and there will be useful information in this newsletter to help foster ideas in everyone, including planning your own family reunions. Tell us what you think! Please contact our reunion chairman, Randy A. Bishop, or me at the e-mails listed on p. 3 of this newsletter.

Planning a Summer Reunion?

by Anne Kirby, editor



The children hurried to the flagpole in front of our house, each with a small flag in hand. Our reunion included Flag Day, and what's more American than a family reunion flag raising? My husband explained the symbolism of our nation's flag, and then of the Kirby flag which flew below it. With hands on hearts and several of us with lumps in our throats, we recited the pledge of allegiance.

Flag Day Reunion

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When all our children had left the nest, we had decided to hold family reunions every other year. So now, after five reunions, we are still going strong with this much-anticipated tradition. Our children have remained close and the cousins love getting together.

Last summer the flag-raising comprised part of our “recession reunion,” spending little money, with the out-of-town families staying with those who live here in our area. It began at our house with a make-your-own pizza party and fence-painting, followed by homemade ice cream. The next day our son, Alan, and his family hosted swimming in their town pool, a barbecue and softball in a park and a hike to a waterfall. Each day brought new activities, and the reunion ended with a trip to the zoo followed by a backyard barbecue at our daughter Sharon’s home. A reunion could be a one-day affair at a park, or spread over several days. A little planning can bring great success.

You can modify what we’ve learned below to fit your circumstances:

- Select a reunion committee if your family is large. “If the committee isn’t organized, the reunion won’t be either,” a good rule of thumb from a helpful website, www.family-reunion.com.
- Choose a date that works for everyone so they can get it on their calendars and ask for time off way ahead of time.
- Select the type of reunion. Where, how big and how expensive? Talk to family members about their preferences. Camping? Bunking with family? Or for a vacation home rental, the cost can be divided evenly among families. We know a family that encourages participants to pay a very small portion each month throughout the year, so it’s not hard on budgets.
- Invite each family to host one meal. They buy the food, prepare the meal and are responsible for the clean-up. For larger families, several groups can team up on a meal.
- Plan activities that bring people together. Sometimes the simplest things work best. For example we found that the barbeque and softball game provided a perfect time for adults and cousins and to play together while others enjoyed just visiting on the sidelines.
- Help your family appreciate their heritage. Post a large family tree, ask for pictures to display, or encourage stories, games, or even skits that perpetuate your family lore.

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“Cousinly” help

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- Find ideas for icebreakers, games, and activities at your library or on the Internet. Delegate!
- Publicize the reunion far ahead of time and then send out several reminders.
- Keep the reunion going afterward by sharing pictures, making a family website, or sending photos to each family. I create a small book after the reunions using an online company such as Shutterfly.com. Those little books become well-worn and the little ones remember everyone's names since parents read them with their children.



Do You Ear What I Ear?

Sometimes an ancestor's name appears in various records with different spellings. For example, the granddaughter of my 7th great-grandfather, John Oliver Sweetland, was born 2 October 1729. County records from Attleboro, Bristol, Massachusetts list her first name sometimes as "Easter" and others as "Esther." (She's found as "Easter" in Doug Sweetland's "Big Book" on page 477.) Genealogist Michael John Neill explained in Ancestry Daily News (7/27) how mishearing and misinterpreting words and phrases can cause confusion for genealogists.

The respondent on an official document or record may not have heard correctly and gave incorrect information as a result. An individual with a hearing problem might easily confuse two names.

The respondent might have misunderstood the question, especially from a census taker. If your ancestor gave an "incorrect" birthplace for his mother or father, is it possible that he interpreted the question as "where is your mother from?" instead of "where was your mother born?"

Was your immigrant ancestor answering questions that were asked in a language he did not understand? Or is it possible that your ancestor was not listening? Maybe he didn't pay one hundred percent attention when the census taker knocked on his door. Did he assume no one would ever really care about the answers 100 years later?

Dialects and variations in pronunciation can impact how words are spelled in records. "Gibson" can easily be pronounced so that it is spelled like "Gepson."

Perhaps the ancestor was not literate and could not "proof" any answers or words listed on any form she might have signed.

While we may never know whether Miss Sweetland's first name was "Esther" or "Easter," knowing about the possibilities for the different spellings can open our eyes as we research.

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