

Descended from royalty

By **KATHERINE NERRET**
Bay County Genealogical Society

Genealogy was once just a fascinating hobby for me, but now has become a fun and creative pastime.

I've heard people say, "I hate history." Well, let me tell you how much you will love history once you can tie your ancestors to world events. And what's more, it's extraordinarily easy. You can receive help from many sources including libraries, genealogical societies and at the Church of the Latter Day Saints.

Let me explain about why this subject might be engaging. Granted, most American families appear ordinary, but it is stated in an sidebar to a November/December 2000 article in Ancestry Magazine entitled, "Giving Your Pedigree the Royal Treatment: Researching Noble Lines," that potentially 60 percent — or more — of the American people are descended from kings. In addition to the royal descents of perhaps 150 million Americans, probably 30 million are distantly related (eighth to 12th cousins) of the late Princess of Wales, Diana. No wonder she captured our hearts so thoroughly.

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I have a friend who is a direct descendant of George Washington's brother. In fact, her maiden name is Washington. The Washingtons can trace their lineage to King Edward III, who ruled England during the 14th century and had nine children who survived into adulthood. Others whose names you might recognize as documented descendants include Humphrey Bogart, Audrey Hepburn, Charles Darwin, Thomas Jefferson, Franklin Roosevelt, Theodore Roosevelt and Robert E. Lee. One of my ancestors, a surveyor, worked with George Washington in mapping out parts of our young country.

By the same token, for every king in a person's family tree there are thousands and thousands of people whose births, lives and deaths went completely unrecorded in history. We might never

know about them, because until recently vital records were rare for all but the noble classes. Even without documented connection to a notable forebear, experts said the odds are virtually 100 percent that every person on Earth is descended from one royal personage or another.

I found, but have not proven, that on my mother's side, a female gateway ancestor can be traced back to William the Conqueror and Charlemagne, who was the first Holy Roman Emperor. Further back I found in the lineage a Frankish king from 6 A. D. "Gateway" is all the people that came from England in the 1600s to start a new life in The New World. They were born in England, most all fairly high-born, but for many reasons decided to take a huge chance and come to America.

Also as a side note, I have learned that my very best friend from high school, who was the one who really encouraged me to join her in her genealogical passion, and I are 19th cousins.

Meeting

The Bay County Genealogical Society meeting is at 1 p.m. Feb. 19 at the Bay County Public Library with Judy Bennett. The topic is "Digital Books on the Internet."