

**TRACING** *Pasts*

# Sometimes seminars bring luck

By **MARY K. McGRAW**

*Bay County Genealogical Society*

Sometimes we genealogists get lucky and stumble upon some information about our ancestors that tells us more than when they were born, died, married, etc. This happened to me in regard to one of my great-grandfathers. Unfortunately he died when my grandmother was 12 years old, and I do not remember her telling me any stories about him. All I knew about his personality was he was a great orator.

Last year, the Bay County Genealogical Society hosted a seminar with a paid speaker, Debra Fleming. She spoke on

a variety of topics. One of them was Genealogy Bank. I never wanted to use this resource as my ancestors lived in small towns and cities, and I thought the newspapers from these places would not show up at genealogybank.com. But Debra suggested larger city newspapers pick up many articles, and it would be worth searching. So I signed up for a trial membership and began exploring. I put in my great-grandfather's name, Joseph E. Cook, and got 880 hits. So I narrowed it down to Joe E. Cook and got a few hits.

One of the hits was an article from the Dallas Morning News, dated Aug. 30, 1892. This article

described an incident that happened in Texarkana, Ark., between my great-grandfather, a noted criminal lawyer, and Marshall James Crenshaw. They were at the Owl Saloon and got into a heated fight over politics, but were separated by friends. My grandfather left and was walking to his office, which was nearby. He was followed by Crenshaw, and they began fighting and pulled out their pocket knives. This fought each other for about a half block, when Crenshaw yelled he had been wounded. His brother-in-law, John Worden, a policeman, heard him and came to his aid by hitting my great-grandfather with the

back of his pistol. He was then taken unconscious to his office. At the time of the writing of the article, my great-grandfather was unconscious and in critical condition. The mayor suspended the policeman, Worden, for his actions.

I know my grandfather recovered, because he did not die until 1913. At the time of the incident, he was married with four small children at home. He went on to have four more children, including my grandmother.

What I found out about great-grandfather from this article was that he went by the name Joe E. Cook; he was

passionate about politics; he could walk away from a fight, but if confronted would fight. Also I found out he visited a saloon, whether for conversation or drinking I am not sure. The article gave me a glimpse of his personality.

To me, the information I learned from this article made the seminar I attended worth more than the cost of admittance. In fact, every seminar I have attended has helped me in my research. So if you get a chance, take advantage of the various genealogical speakers, whether locally at the Bay County Genealogical Society, regionally or nationally. You might get lucky.