

Thanksgiving for most is supposed to serve as a reminder of the roots of our nation. To one family though, it is especially close to their hearts as it also is a reminder of the foundation of their family.

The Leonards, whose roots were planted here (Gunnison) — first in the Doyleville area — in 1896 have a direct connection to the Mayflower, the ship that set sail in 1620 with men and women determined to colonize the “New World” on behalf of King James of England.

The Leonards’ ancestors include some important men to our nation’s history by the name of John Tilly, John Howland and Richard Warren, all signers of the Mayflower Compact. Ulysses S. Grant, the famous Civil War General and 18th U.S. President, descended from the Richard Warren family.

Phillipe de La Noye — whose surname was later changed to de Lannoy and then to Delano — came to America later, on the 1621 ship Fortune. His descendants include Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the 32nd President of the United States. And all are connected to the Leonards.

“This is our pedigree,” the 81 year old matriarch, Anita Leonard-Geddes explains in reference to a table sized chart she keeps that tracks the exact lineage of her family. Anita came to the Gunnison Country from Texas in 1943 as an only child. She later married Cass Leonard, fresh from serving in World War II, started their own brood of three children — Ron, Sheri and Kerry.

Anita who has always enjoyed history and puzzles took up genealogy as a hobby in 1973. She began her research by talking with Cass’ many cousins and going to the local library and courthouse. She even took advantage of her longtime job as the postmaster in Almont, talking with patrons who had the same last names as ones she’d been researching.

She compiled a huge book of family information; 487 pages and counting that lead all the way back to the Mayflower and further. Some of the information is more recent, like the diary of Marion E. (McDowell) Leonard, on the family’s covered wagon trek from Phillipsburg, Kan., to Colorado. When they encountered 5 foot deep snow on the their trip to Montrose in an effort to better Marion’s health, they stopped. Doyleville became their home and Cass was born there in 1916.

Anita says she gathered all of the information simply from going book to book and says she is lucky because the Leonards never threw anything away. This is evident by the diary that she found when Cass passed away in 1993. He had been keeping a detailed journal of his life that she never knew about. This precious account of Cass’ life even contains stories of his stint in World War II.

Anita says that both Cass and his father, Ed, hated research. But they would always ask what she had found out on the days that she worked on tracing their ancestry.

She observes that today’s youth don’t often care much about ancestry, or history in general. Her dogged pursuit of the past, however, seems to have rubbed off her grandkids — at least on Kyla and her brother, Ryan.

Kyla proudly claims that her family is very fortunate to have her grandmother who has showed interest and dedication in her hard work to uncover the family history.

She says that Anita's children and grandchildren reap great benefits from her labor. Anita has said that she never had any trouble tracing the roots of her interest. She says it stems from what she call a lonely childhood. Not having family of her own gave her the drive to put together the "Work Book" for the family she helped create that so interestingly details the Leonard ancestry.