

See: Our Family Circle
pp 297-299

Feb. 9, 1998

~~North Carolina~~

~~Nobby 1860~~

~~Queensland~~

~~Australia~~

Dear Rev. Peoples,

I appreciate your faithful correspondence and the help you have extended to me in so many ways. Again, I must apologize for my erratic correspondence. Things have a way of getting away from me sometimes as I tend to take on too much. Nevertheless, here I am to try to pick up the pieces of our last "conversation". Kindly bear with me.

My husband brought back the book by Cousin Annie, thank you. I have skimmed through it a few times but have yet to read through the book in earnest. I had taken note of the sections pertaining to my limb of the family tree and wondered at the sparseness of details. Yet, on the other hand, it is becoming apparent to me that my Rev Dr John Wesley Heidt- Eliza Agnes Villard family seemed to have dispersed to parts of the US/world and lost touch with each other. This is not surprising as four of the five sons were in the military service, and were moved about so much like chess pieces on a board.

I have had contact with some members of my Villard-Heidt family since the mid-80's, others I found only recently. Among the recent contacts are descendants of Carobel Heidt Calhoun. They obviously do not know much of the Villard-Heidt family, much to my surprise. They knew only of two brothers (supposedly both without issue - one of them being my James V. Heidt) of their grandmother Carobel and were disbelieving that there were three other brothers, two with surviving descendants. The Heidt-Calhoun descendants have actually believed all these time that they are the only surviving descendants of Rev Dr John Wesley Heidt and Eliza Agnes Villard! (But I'm getting ahead of the story here. To back track.....)

My James Villard Heidt was a 27 year old officer (Lt.) with the 6th Infantry when it was shipped to the Philippines to fight in the Spanish-American War. The year was 1898 and the Infantry was based in the island of Negros. Lt Heidt had the task of interviewing one of the insurgents (freedom fighters) by the name of Julio Hechanova-Benedicto. The insurgents were primarily anti-Spanish so there was no animosity between the two men. Julio was the scion of wealthy sugar barons with several plantations in Negros and neighboring islands.. (At the turn of the century, most of the sugar supplied to the world came from the Philippines. A few Spanish-descended families benefited from the monopoly, the Hechanova-Benedictos among them.)

Julio, in the usual cordial and hospitable ways of the islands, invited the American officer to his parents' manorial home. It was there that James met Guadalupe Hechanova-Benedicto, the youngest of 16 siblings of Julio. It was love at first sight, according to family favorite tales, with anecdotes to boot. The Hechanova-Benedicto matriarch (she had the business acumen and so she was the boss!) and patriarch were alarmed at this development as Guadalupe was only 14 years of age, a lovely winsome lass with soft brown eyes and long brown wavy hair and fine facial features, but still so very young. She was also the apple of her parents' eye. They took to hiding her from James by sending her off to any one of their numerous plantation homes. James went in hot pursuit, aided and abetted by Julio.

b. 17 Dec. 1885

When James finally caught up with Guadalupe, there was nothing more her parents could do but allow their marriage to take place. By all accounts, James was a most indulgent and loving husband. He adored his young wife. The first child (b. 1901), named Josephine, died at 8 months of age. In July 5, 1902, twin daughters were born to Guadalupe and James. One of the twins was my maternal grandmother, Mary Esther Heidt.

b. 10 May 1873

On the same day as the twins were born, James received his promotion to Captaincy and a change of location assignment. Here is where things started to unravel for James. As a fighting soldier, he couldn't drag his young family with him. (I would not be surprised if the U.S. Army actively discouraged him from getting married to a "native" in the first instance, and later, from taking his young family with him to every assignment. The U.S. Army has always toed a hard-line, unhumanitarian if you ask me, when it came to marriages with locals.) So, he settled for a compromise arrangement with Guadalupe's parents - that Guadalupe and the twins would stay in Negros where they would be safe and well looked after until he could come and collect his young family to bring to the States. What he had not known was that her parents had no intention of ever letting Guadalupe and the twins move to halfway round the world, so far away from them they may as well have been in another planet. Who would look after them? How can a young girl born with a silver spoon in her mouth cope in a foreign country, with babies to look after? They may never see their favorite daughter again if she leaves the islands. These must have been some of their concerns.

Guadalupe's parents went to great lengths to effect a permanent break in the marriage. They moved their entire family to another province. They told Guadalupe that James had died in a skirmish in the island of Mindanao. They told Guadalupe that they refused, on her behalf, the "widow's pension" offered by the U.S. Army. (I think this was a ploy to convince her that her husband was well and truly dead.) And so on.

When James looked for his family in Negros, he could not find them. I am not sure how many times he tried to look for them but it is on record that in the years circa 1910, he signed up with the army supply ship that made its rounds around the Pacific islands. For an infantry man to sign up with a ship, his reasons for doing so must be urgent and of utmost importance. You have no idea how it makes my heart ache each and every time I think of how hard he tried to find his family in the Philippines.

Guadalupe was in blissful ignorance of all of these to the day she died in the late 1970's. She remained faithful to her wedding vows with James, never ever looking at another man, devoting her life to her twin daughters. She and her daughters always spoke of James in the highest respect and tenderest of feelings. They believed him dead since the early 1900's. They took that belief to their graves.

My mother, the eldest of the children of Mary Esther Heidt, was born in 1926 - just to give you a time frame. So, it was not until she and her siblings were young adults that the urge to find their American relations became strongly felt. Prior to that time, there were few a sporadic attempts to find their relations, the other members of the Villard-Heidt family. The U.S. Army stonewalled their every attempt then as in more recent times.

11 Nov. 1926

In the 1970's a number of the descendants of James Villard Heidt travelled to the U.S., some settling there. The search for our Villard-Heidt relations went into high gear. It was a terrible shock to all of us to find out that our progenitor did not die in the early 1900's as we had

always been made to believe, but in 1953. And, just as shocking, was to find out he had remarried to one Miss Hotze in 1918. To this day, some descendants of James V. Heidt remain very upset and angry at this. For my part, I have tried to understand why things happened the way they did. In the end, I would have to conclude that as with all human dramas, there are many sides to a story and that James did what he felt was the right thing to do at the time and Guadalupe's parents did what they thought was best for their daughter at the time. Each had their own agenda, unable to see very far into the future of the twins and their young mother.

The effect of the 1970's findings was immediate cessation of the search for American relations; that is, until the mid-1980's when my mother begged me to take on the project. It was her dearest wish to find her Villard-Heidt cousins before she left this earthly existence. So I obliged her. In a few short months, I found for her the descendants of the youngest brother of James V. Heidt. She was ecstatic. But then my career demanded more and more of my time and I had little choice but to shelve the project for another time.

In April last year, while on long leave, I took the project off the shelf to have another look. Admittedly, I have spent more time on my Monroe-Grayson line than my Grayson-Heidt, and Villard-Heidt connections. But I have now a fairly good and general idea of the pedigree of my g-grandfather James V. Heidt. I may have mentioned it before, but he did leave a witnessed and notarized account of his family history and antecedents. I had set out in April to double check on his details so I could leave a fairly accurate family history to my only son. I found out more than I bargained for!

As to why James Villard Heidt kept his Philippine family a "secret", I can only guess. Men in those days tended to keep things to themselves. Perhaps he considered it a personal "failure" to lose his young family. Perhaps he was unsure as to the reception from his Georgia-South Carolina born and raised family of the news about his Philippine family. I rather suspect that the brother (Col. Grayson Villard Heidt) he was closest to knew of his family in the islands and had helped him in his search for his young family. Col. Grayson V. Heidt was in the Philippines in the years prior to 1910. I don't believe for one moment that James had designed to "cast off" Guadalupe and the twins, considering he did not remarry till 1918, when he was 46 years of age, and considering that he signed up with a Pacific supply ship. Interesting that he when he remarried, he chose a woman who was, for all practical purposes, past child bearing age. Whether he first obtained a divorce or whatever prior to remarriage, I do not know.

As to proof of his marriage to my g-grandmother Guadalupe and birth certificates for the twins, I can only tell you that the Japanese, with their scorched earth policy, went through towns and cities systematically and burned everything to the ground, with fair success. My mother and her cousins (descended from James' other twin daughter, Ramona Heidt) went through records of several churches in that area of Negros but had been warned that most records prior to and during WW II did not survive the war. Unsurprisingly, they had no success in their search. (In my nuclear family, birth certificates (mine and parents') and marriage certificate (parents') had gone up in smoke during WW II. It made for difficulty in getting passports, and settling other legal or official procedures, even to this day.

Now, in two days' time, I will be enplaning for Manila, for the main purpose of combing through churches and government offices and other repositories of civil records in Negros. I

will make an effort to find the marriage record of my maternal g-grandparents and the birth records of their daughters. My chances of success are not high but I am going to make an effort towards this goal. Mother and her cousins may have missed some vital clues. At this stage, I should point out that it is highly improbable as well as impossible that Guadalupe and James were not married by legal or religious (which is equivalent to legal in the Philippines) ceremony. Considering that the Hechanova-Benedicto family was powerful socially, politically (one descendant became Vice-President of the Philippines), economically, and was a proud and dignified family, they would not have permitted a casual arrangement in these matters. It was/is simply and absolutely out of the question. And, if, by way of pure supposition, James had refused a legal tie after compromising their daughter, he would have been giving his life away, literally. No two ways about that.

You had indicated the need to show the birth certificate of my grandmother, Mary Esther Heidt, to qualify for the three organizations mentioned in previous letters. Surely, these organizations have provisions for cases where records have been lost. Otherwise, it would be totally unfair to close their doors on bonafide descendants simply because records were lost or unavailable due to reasons beyond their control.

Anyway, for now, what I can show you are photocopies of photographs of descendants of James Villard Heidt. One daughter of Mary Esther Heidt married one of the sons of her twin Ramona Heidt. The children from this union show remarkable similarity to the Villards especially. The sons of Ramona Heidt resemble the sons of Rev Dr John Wesley Heidt. I have few photographs in my possession here (having lived outside the Philippines for over 30 years) but I will share those with you and will collect more while in Manila in Feb and Mar. to share with you later.

Thank you for your kind words about my son. He is currently in Indonesia as a "youth ambassador" for Australia. His sponsor, the Australian Dept of Foreign Affairs and Trade, managed to "place" him with the Parliament in Indonesia for his "ambassadorship". This apparently was a rare permission granted by the Parliament. I think Sean's record as an excellent student in Law helped. Sean will be back to rejoin his class at university soon. He has won the University Gold Medal for being the "Most Outstanding Undergraduate Student" in terms of academic achievement. He will spend a year or so in the U.S. as part of his undergraduate studies and is looking forward to a postgraduate degree in the U.K. at either Oxford, Cambridge, or possibly, Edinburgh (in consideration of his blood ties to the Clan Munro). It is for him and for my mother that I have been doing all these family research for.

Well, this is getting to be an epistle. I hope this has given some clarification on questions you have raised. When I return from Manila, in mid- March, I expect I would find a letter from you with more questions for me to respond to. I welcome any queries and comments you may have. Till then. Take care. And, by the way, I will be in the U.S. in Sept and Oct this year. I will make it a point to visit with you.

I will chase up "Old Plantation" by Nancy William Bostick when I'm next in the States. Thank you for the advice. Also, I wish to accept your offer of sending to me "a correct pedigree of Landgrave Smith back to two of the Barons who were Sureties for Magna Charta in 1215, as well as to King Edward I of England".

With thanks,

Virginia Redden