



Western Massachusetts Genealogical Society, Inc.

Finding Ancestors on Facebook

by Joanne Mason

Feeling hesitant about using Facebook for your family tree? Let me share an experience that brought down a brick wall and connected me to long-lost relatives I now stay in touch with.

Over the years, I've used Facebook in a number of ways for genealogy. I've gotten help from local historical societies, libraries, and discussion groups for certain locations (upstate New York, for example) and time periods, like the Great Migration.

But perhaps the simplest way I've used Facebook to learn more about my tree started with a direct message.

I'd been researching my Dad's maternal side in central Maine, specifically the Pond family. My great-grandmother was Minnie Pond Beane, and I see her father in census records, but beyond that, I am stuck. There are some clues that the family might have been Loyalists that moved from South Carolina to New Brunswick, Canada. But I haven't confirmed that.

Minnie's daughter, my grandmother Gladys Beane Mason, had an older sister, Florence, whom I met several times as a child. Every family trip to Maine included a visit to Aunt Florence. On the way, we crossed the Piscataquis River on a covered bridge that I was deathly afraid of. (I was convinced that we would fall off the other side until my father gently took my hand and walked me to the end, proving that the road did continue.)

My grandmother died when I was 9. For some reason, my family lost touch with Florence. We didn't know when she passed away, and we knew little about her children and grandchildren.

Decades later, in 2015, I was searching online for Minnie. On one site, I noticed a post from a woman whose name included Florence's married surname. I figured it had to be a relative, so I did some more digging and found her on Facebook.

Now came the awkward part. Should I contact her? Would she mind being sought out by a stranger out of the blue?

So I started with the usual, "Um..hi...you don't know me, but...."

Soon after I got a response. She was Florence's granddaughter!

Over time, I got to know other members of Florence's family and was invited to join a Facebook group for that branch. Brick walls quickly collapsed as group members generously shared their research. I was happy to post photos, records, and autograph book pages that they had never seen before.

But perhaps the best part was the messages I received. Many members of the group remembered my grandmother. She was called "Aunt Gladdie." Her house in Abbot Village had a summer kitchen. She was a lot of fun!

I thanked everyone, telling them my family had always wondered what happened to Florence and her family.

"We'd been wondering about your family, too, Joanne," one wrote back.

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