



THE NICHOLAS ROBBINS FAMILY

A Genealogical Miscellany

THE NICHOLAS ROBBINS FAMILY NEWSLETTER

SPRING, 2011

Discovering My Robbins Roots

by Sandy (Robbins) Becker

It is a pleasure and an honor to share with you my story about two of the most important and influential people in my life: my grandmother, Fiorena Cimino, and my father, Ellsworth Joseph Robbins.

To sum them up in a word - love - unconditional love. I have been without them now for 12 and 13 years but to keep the memory alive I often put a pot of homemade spaghetti sauce on the stove in my own home just to smell the smell of my grandmother's kitchen once again.

My Nani was Italian by descent and her family came from Pianopoli, Calabria, Italy. Growing up I was surrounded by the Cimino family of Frankfort and Herkimer, New York. There is nothing like the love and celebration that is passed around in a large Italian family. Family gatherings included lots of aunts, uncles, cousins, big warm hugs, hearing the Italian language, pasta, meatballs and my Aunt Irene's ceiling high piles of homemade Italian cookies. These are the memories I cherish from my childhood.

Quite often I have said to my husband that someday I would like to visit Italy to see where my family came from. This past Christmas I decided to trace the family tree on Ancestry.com to see if I had any living relatives to connect to. In the beginning my search was concentrated on the Cimino line. My grandmother was born Fiorena Cimino on March 23, 1907 in the United States. She was the first of fourteen siblings born here. As my tree grew and I added more members I also hit many road blocks. During one of those road blocks, I became curious about what information I might find on my Robbins side. I knew my father's father was Ellsworth H. Robbins. While searching Ancestry.com I came upon the family tree of another member which had my father's and grandfather's name in their tree. As I studied the tree I knew it had to be my family. For the first time I had come face to face with the names of family members I had never heard of or been introduced to. I learned that my great-grandfather's name was Bernard Ellsworth Robbins, which presented a sweet familiarity with people I loved - my father Ellsworth and his older brother Bernard were both named after him. I learned my grandfather had a brother named Frederick Lester Robbins. This was a surprise to me. I had never been told of him. My great-great grandfather, Stephen Sumner Robbins (1848-1933) and his wife, Lydia T. Trefry (1853-1922), were also listed on the owner's tree. I emailed the owner to tell him who I was and to ask him if he knew anything about my grandfather, Ellsworth Robbins. He did not so I kept searching.

I soon stumbled upon another family tree that claimed the Robbins roots went all the way back to early Massachusetts. This tree went from Frederick Lester Robbins to my ninth great-grandfather, Nicholas Robbins, but made no mention of my grandfather or my dad. I still wasn't completely sure this was really my family. I wanted proof so I began to search for other documentation such as birth and death certificates or anything else I

could find. I also began looking for information on my great-grandfather, Bernard Ellsworth Robbins. I couldn't find anything on Ancestry.com so I googled his name on the internet and up came *The Nicholas Robbins Family* website. There I found a newsletter article written by Richard Robbins with all the names I had just discovered on the two previously mentioned family trees. My grandfather wasn't mentioned by name but there was information on his brother, Frederick Sumner Lester Robbins, Richard's father. Next I emailed the website editor, Lawrence Robbins, and at the same time I went to my grandfather's trunk and pulled out all of the old letters he had saved. I really felt that this was my family and that I was on the right track. Confirmation soon came from the website editor and at the same time I matched the names in the letters with the names in Richard Robbins's newsletter article. I was surprised, amazed, overwhelmed and completely overjoyed that I had found my family. I was also surprised to find out about my family's Mayflower connections in the newsletter article. It was amazing to put all the pieces together and to find that I had living Robbins family members after the personal loss of my dad and grandmother.

My father, Ellsworth Joseph Robbins, was born on October 5, 1932 to Fiorena (Cimino) Robbins and Ellsworth Havelock Robbins of Herkimer, New York. He had an older brother, Bernard F. Robbins, also born of that marriage. My father never left Herkimer, residing his whole life in that town. He attended the Utica School of Commerce in pursuit of an accounting degree but business really wasn't his heart. After that he went to work for Salada Foods Company in Little Falls, New York, where he was employed for the next 35 years. My mother, Judith Ann Coe of Canastota, New York, is the daughter of Doris Melinda Fowler and John Aubrey Warburton.

My father served in the Korean War where he sustained a shrapnel injury to the foot and was never able to walk again without a little stagger. He never talked about what happened to him there. He was a private in the military police.

My uncle, Bernard F. Robbins, is alive and well at 80 years of age and lives on Cape Cod, Massachusetts. He and his wife Mary have three children: Christon, who is married with two little sons; Wendell, who is single and lives in Connecticut; and Naomi, who is single and lives in Wellsley, Massachusetts.

I was born in the summer of 1966 in upstate New York to two young people still in high school. My birth mother's parents placed me up for adoption and a couple months later I was adopted by Ellsworth and Judy (Coe) Robbins. I was raised in Herkimer until my parents divorced when I was ten years of age. I spent my growing up years between my mother's house in Sherrill, New York, and my dad's house in Herkimer. My dad lived just down the street from his mother, my Nani. They were very close and every day twice a day he would walk to her house to spend time with her and to fix her meals. He took care of her this way for almost twenty years. My father passed away in May, 1998, and Nani passed away in December, 1999. I miss them both so much.

Sandy (Robbins) Becker graduated from Vernon-Verona-Sherrill High School in 1984 and went into early childhood education. She later earned an AAS degree from Herkimer County Community College in 1997 and a teaching credential from Montessori in 2007. She presently resides in southern Maine with her husband and children and is the owner-operator of Briarwood Children's House, a Montessori School. The school currently serves 174 pre-school and kindergarten children and has 24 employees. For further information about these family lines, the reader may contact Sandy via email at sandybckr22@gmail.com .

THE ROBBINS SISTERS OF LONG ISLAND

Correspondence from Nancy Pisco

(Editor's Note: Nancy Pisco of Lords Valley, Pennsylvania has supplied the Newsletter with some very interesting newspaper clippings pertaining to her grandmother, Abigail Adella (Robbins) Simmons. Abigail was the eldest of

the five children, all daughters, of Joseph Rasette Robbins, the founder and early publisher of the Smithtown (New York) Messenger, and his wife Alwena (Burke) Robbins. The others, in order of birth were: Caroline Elizabeth, Sarah Loretta, Alwena M. ("Ollie") and Theresa Josephine. Theresa died as an infant. The first clipping recounts the family's early days in Smithtown and includes interviews with Abigail's sister, Alwena, and her daughter, Catherine Simmons. The second clipping is Abigail's obituary and the third is the obituary of Abigail's father, Joseph Rasette Robbins. The first clipping was reported by Robert S. Braile and published in the Smithtown Messenger of February 23, 1978. The origins of the second and third clippings are unknown.)

Abigail Adella Simmons Celebrates 100th Year

On February 25th, a birthday party will be held at the St. James Nursing Home in honor of 100 year old Abigail Adella Simmons, the eldest child of Joseph and Alwena Robbins, founders of the Smithtown Messenger.

In discussing the upcoming event, Abigail, her younger sister Alwena Robbins and her daughter, Catherine Simmons, drew a rich and colorful portrait of their lives together that captured much of local history.

According to Catherine, whose extensive research into her family lineage probes as far back as the late 1700s, Abigail was born on February 28, 1878 in the Northport home of her parents. Her four sisters, Carrie, Loretta, Tressy and Alwena, were born in the ten years following her birth.

Abigail's childhood typified late nineteenth century America in a variety of ways, foremost of which was the necessity of labor. "One hundred years ago, your children learned how to work," commented Alwena. "We were chambermaids, although there were no particular titles back then. Abigail must have started working when she was 12 or 13." The two sisters worked at the Long Island Hotel, formerly of Center Moriches.

Abigail's grandparents, Benjamin and Helen Robbins, were founders of the Northport Journal. Their son, Joseph, perpetuated the Robbins newspaper tradition by founding the Smithtown Messenger in 1887. Yet, according to Catherine, Joseph Robbins didn't allow his daughters to become very involved in the paper at all.

"Neither Abigail or Alwena had much of anything to do with the paper," noted Catherine. Even though the building in which they published the paper doubled as their home, the Robbins daughters were kept away from the business. "We lived in the same building as the paper, so I had my nose in it for awhile," said Alwena. "But I didn't do much except fold papers and such."

"As far as Abigail was concerned, she was working as a chambermaid up to her marriage," Alwena continued. "Carrie worked in the paper for a few years. But Loretta wouldn't. Too dirty."

In 1895, at the age of 17, Abigail married Seydmore Simmons. The service took place in Manorville, Long Island. "At the time they met, Seydmore worked on a farm," Alwena said. "He later became a boatman on a small barge they used to carry coal on."

Abigail and Seydmore resided on High Street in Port Jefferson, where he continued working as a boatman and she devoted herself to raising a family. Between 1896 and 1919, the couple had a total of ten children.

Catherine noted that it was a turn-of-the-century custom for one of the daughters in a family to assist her mother in caring for her other sisters and their children. That role was assumed by Alwena. "Aunt Alwena was the one," said Catherine. "She never got married". "It just turned out that way, being the youngest," added Alwena. Catherine described how Alwena spent much of her life working for private families, many times traveling to Europe as a governess. "I also used to take care of foster children," added Alwena.

"Smithtown was a country place in those days," continued Alwena. "the printing office of the Messenger was on New York Avenue at First. The first post office was on the corner, the general store was next door, and opposite that was the Brush estate that went from Hauppauge Road to Lawrence Avenue to Miller's Pond. The Brushes wanted it to be called Brush's Pond but it was called Miller's Pond. Opposite the estate was a hotel and an old store."

"There weren't too many people. Down Maple Avenue was pretty built up but New York Avenue didn't go down too far. There was a store or two by the railroad station. Those that didn't have little stores or businesses used to commute to New York City."

Business was not for Abigail, however. Rather, she sought to embody the virtues traditionally associated with American motherhood. "Abigail's always been a sensitive person and very concerned with her family," Catherine began. "She'd do anything she could to take care of her family. She practically brought up my children while I worked."

"She's always been a fantastic seamstress," continued Catherine in the same strain, "particularly embroidery, quilts and all kinds of fancy work. That was her thing. She used to make all the clothes for my oldest boy. Alwena used to make the dresses for my girl. I thought I could sew until I met these ladies. I'm an amateur compared to these ladies."

Abigail has been a resident of St. James Nursing Home since 1974. Alwena resides at the Woodhaven Adult Home in Port Jefferson. The two sisters spend most of their time sewing and caring for their flower gardens. "Abigail is into all the activities here --- birthday parties, fairs --- she loves to go," stated Catherine. "She loves to be with people and is not shy in that respect."

A total of forty family members and forty residents of St. James Nursing Home are expected to attend the Abigail Adella Simmons party, to celebrate not just a birthday, but a living symbol of a vintage American era.

Abigail Simmons Dies at 105

Abigail Simmons, 105, who had 17 grandchildren, 55 great-grandchildren and 22 great-great grandchildren, died on April 29 at St. James Nursing Home. Mrs. Simmons had marked her 105th birthday on February 27.

She had been a resident of Port Jefferson for more than 60 years. Mrs. Simmons was the mother of 11 children; four survive. They are Helen Hansen of Florida and upstate New York; Edith Cooper, a former Port Jefferson resident, now of Rocky Point; Beatrice Wandursky of Huntington; and Edward Simmons, formerly of Port Jefferson, now of Calverton. She also is survived by a sister, Ollie Robbins of Sunrest Nursing Home.

Services were private. Funeral arrangements were handled by O. B. Davis Funeral Home, Port Jefferson Station.

Joseph Robbins Dies, Publisher and Politician

Joseph Rasette Robbins, former editor of the Smithtown Messenger, died of pneumonia last Wednesday at the South Side Hospital, Bay Shore.

Mr. Robbins, who was born in Brooklyn, March 14, 1854, was known in newspaper circles throughout New York State. He was a charter member of the Long Island Press Association and also a member of the I.O.O.F. He was active in Suffolk County Democratic politics for many years.

Mr. Robbins started the Messenger in 1887 at Center Moriches, moving later to Smithtown where until ten years ago he conducted the newspaper. It then was sold to Lawrence F. Deutzman. He leaves his wife and four daughters, Alwena M. Robbins and Abigail Simmons of Port Jefferson; Loretta Tobin of Woodhaven; and Caroline Stillman of Riverhead. Twelve grandchildren, seven great-grandchildren and two step-grandchildren also survive.

Funeral services were held at his late residence at Smithtown on Sunday at 3 p. m. Burial was at Center Moriches at 2 p. m. on Monday.



The original site of the Smithtown Messenger on the corner of New York Avenue and Main Street, Smithtown, NY



Abigail Adella Simmons in 1898
Port Jefferson, New York



Four of the five daughters of Joseph and Alwena Robbins of Long Island in 1975
Back row (l-r): Loretta, Abigail and Carrie. Front row: Alwena

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