

## Spend a year taking the ancestor challenge

By Karen Zach, Around the County

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On the Indiana Genealogy Facebook page I monitor, I asked a Group Gab question of what genealogical goals (or resolutions) did people have for the year. One member had an amazing idea and that was to do a 52 week challenge of writing up an ancestor a week. I loved it, so am going to try to do just that. Here's an example if you want to grab the idea!

Although this ancestor isn't one I could truly say I'm proud of, he is fascinating and has been a source of entertainment now and again. Born the first day of August in 1815 in Ontario County, New York, he moved with his parents, Simeon and Hester Ann (Helms) Smith to Sullivan County in 1818 and ten years later to Parke County where the family stayed, Simeon helping to build the courthouse there. Reuben had a major drinking problem, but was a hard worker, digging ditches most of his life. His first wife and my ancestor was Mary Ann Helms, his first cousin – hmmm, maybe that's what's wrong with me? Reuben was the 9th child of Simeon and Hester of their eleven. Most of his brothers carried the middle name Coleman (Simeon's mother was Sarah Coleman). Obviously, Reuben did not but never in 50 years of researching have I figured out what Reuben's middle name could be. Every possible record simply says Reuben D. Smith. His grandfather, George Smith, Revolutionary War Soldier's mother was Hannah Denn so I've always wondered if it might be that since the mother's maiden name of Coleman is so widely used as a middle name, not only in Reuben's brothers but passed down more generations. There are no first names in Helms, Coleman or the Smith lines that begin with a D so ...

Also in all this time, I've not found Reuben and Mary's marriage record, but it would likely be in 1836 (in Sullivan or more likely Parke County, both courthouses having fires about that time so records are sparse) as their first son, William P. Smith was born on the 4th day of August in 1837. Another mystery is when Mary Helms Smith passed away but it was of course before his 1854 remarriage to Elizabeth Davis Painter who brought to their marriage seven Painter children. The yours, mine and ours totaled 16 kids. Reuben and Elizabeth had two of their own, Sarah and Warren. I believe that Mary Ann likely died birthing (or shortly thereafter) my ancestor, Joseph Monroe Smith who was born in September of 1851. In Reuben's daughter, Mary Ann Hallett's obituary it says her mother died when she was a child. Mary Ann would have been six then. Speculation of course, but it makes sense to me. It is even unknown where she is buried, but likely the old Rockville cemetery where Reuben had no stone, his parents having nice stones several years ago when I was there but not sure if they are still there (just check findagrave fairly good photos of them but his is down on the ground) as that particular cemetery has had a great deal of vandalism. Afraid to go see!

Reuben and his second wife, Elizabeth had a nasty divorce, she noting that he was drunk and disorderly most of the time. However (due to finances would be my guess) she remarried him not long after. To date, I don't know what happened to her either, but she is in the 1870 and 1880 census with him. He passed away in 1898 as a widower, lacking two days of being 83 years old. Joseph was a pretty heavy drinker as well but Joseph's son, my grandfather rarely drank. An occasional beer. He was highly intelligent, especially in calculating math figures, working several years for a surveyor who always said my gpa' was better than he was at it. Me? I didn't get the math gene. I have no photo of Reuben, no photo of a tombstone but here is a photo of Joseph who was supposed to have looked like his ancestors, passing it along – tall, then, nice looking!

So, Reuben wasn't one to particularly put on a pedestal but without him, I'd not be here so thank you Reuben D. Smith for the life you did lead to eventually create me as I love life and getting to research you and those who went before you! (And, I'm looking forward to next week's ancestor challenge!)



*Karen Zach is the editor of Montgomery Memories, our monthly magazine all about Montgomery County. Her column, Around the County, appears each Thursday in The Paper of Montgomery County.*