



NEWSLETTER *of the* *Tefft Family Association*

uncovering the past

the descendants of John and William Tefft

Vol. 3, No. 1
Winter 2002

In this issue:

Heraldry, family crests and coats of arms tempt the researcher back in time to the 15th century and across the ocean in

search of ever deeper knowledge of family roots. Our exploration leads us to a turn-of-the-century reference to a Tefft Coat of Arms illustrated and found in an American tradition of heraldic art. Like much in the past, it leaves us with as many questions as it does answers.



Next issue . . .

We look ahead to the Tefft Family Reunion, Oct. 12 -14, 2002, with a travel guide to places of interest and tips for Teffts in search of their history and heritage in Rhode Island.

Tefft *Coat of Arms*

by Darlene Tefft Cobb and
Timothy Nathan Tefft

The exploration of family history and genealogy will inevitably lead determined researchers as far back in time as their ancestral trail will take them. For researchers of families from England and other

European origins, the 15th century beckons. Preserved out of the mists of the Middle Ages are family records that deal with heraldry, family crests and coats of arms. These relics relate to the art of war and to a family's standing in the social order of the day. Delve into these ancient realms, blow away the dust of centuries, and you find symbols that speak an archaic, almost alien, language.

Make no mistake. Alluring as these murky secrets may be, what lies buried in the dim past is not about to reveal itself quickly or well without considerable trouble on the part of the seeker. And seekers must beware. Warning signs are everywhere and scoffers of these things abound with good reason. The best we are hoping to do in this newsletter is give our readers some sense of where the study of a coat of arms might lead and, without any official stamp of approval implied, offer a pictorial representation of something claiming to be an authentic Tefft Coat of Arms.

The Tefft Coat of Arms

The only Tefft Coat of Arms we know of is illustrated in a bookplate, or front piece of a book, belonging to Emma Augusta Tefft, circa 1900. Documentation for the Tefft Coat of Arms design can be found in Bolton's *American Armory*, page 162, with comments contributed by Dorris Blossom.

In her remarks, Blossom notes that the coat of arms was drawn by a heraldic artist from information officially recorded in ancient heraldic archives. The motto recorded with the Tefft Coat of Arms is: "UBIQUE FIDELIS," everywhere faithful.

"Based on extensive research and years of study in onomastic sciences (the study of the origin, history and use of proper names), it is believed the surname Tefft is patronymical in origin," Blossom writes. "Scholars agree that the name is

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Welcome Family, Associates and Friends . . .

Our family research tells us that our roots go deep into the American soil. The document history takes us back to two brothers, William and John Tefft (Teffe), the family's founders in America, who arrived on these shores sometime in the 1630s. But from where? England seems to be the best guess, but family tradition hints at other origins, perhaps Wales, maybe Ireland, possibly even Holland or France.

Lacking better evidence of this earlier national origin, one family member jokes that we must have sprung up on America's shores like mushrooms and may never know how or from whence we journeyed "across the puddle." (So much for any notion that Teffts are *Somebodies*, which after all can only be meaningful by comparison. It is, in fact, all relative!)

We know that Tefft genealogists of the past surely wondered as much as we do where the family originated. And we're working to locate, evaluate and expand on the answers they found. Surviving this search for Tefft origins is a bookplate illustration of a Tefft Coat of Arms used by Emma Augusta Tefft around 1900. Does this alone prove the family has English or European origins? We don't think so given the record of questionable research and motives of those who produced (and still provide) crests and coats of arms "to order." Still, it might be genuine; and if so, then we possibly have the beginnings of an answer to a most elusive question. For now, all we can do is offer what we know of this Tefft Coat of Arms and encourage researchers to discover more. Happy hunting!

Darlene Tefft Cobb
Interim President, Tefft Family Association

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Family Album



Kathleen Tiftt Cooper with husband John and feathered friends, Sunny and Princess.

Hello cousins and friends. My name is Kathleen Tiftt Cooper, and I am a descendant of John Tefft through his 3rd great-grandson George (son of Samuel and Amy Gardiner) and his second wife, Harmony Mitchell, who settled in Coles County, Illinois after leaving Rhode Island and residing for a time in New York.

My husband John and I live in Carlsbad, Calif., with our two parrots, Sunny and Princess. John's son, Philip, visits when possible from London where he is a budding architect. John is originally from Yorkshire, England, but is thoroughly hooked on California living. He is not involved in genealogy except to add his support (that includes searching very wet cemeteries in Ireland on our vacation) and enjoy my successes — although any part of the process that connects to computers will grab his attention for a time.

When I began researching our family history about six years ago, my father, Edward Bradford Tiftt, told me his sister had uncovered a connection to Governor William Bradford of Plymouth, which he thought was very important. And oh, yes, there were a lot of Tiftts in New York, but he didn't know where they came from. Little did he know I would briefly explore the Bradford connection, but be thoroughly hooked by the Teffts.

After meeting Timothy Nathan Tefft and Dick Tefft via e-mail, I was caught up in the cause of saving what was left of the Tefft homestead in Rhode Island and eventually saw it myself while attending the 2000 reunion. What a serendipitous thing this has been, leading to new friendships and interests, reconnecting many immediate family members, and greatly expanding on my definition of family. I can honestly say I have not met a new cousin who is not a 'keeper!'

What's **GOING ON** at the **TEFFT HOMESTEAD** ?

by Darlene Tefft Cobb

With fundraising to purchase the 225-year-old Tefft Homestead property over, past and would-be contributors have been asking: What now at the homestead?

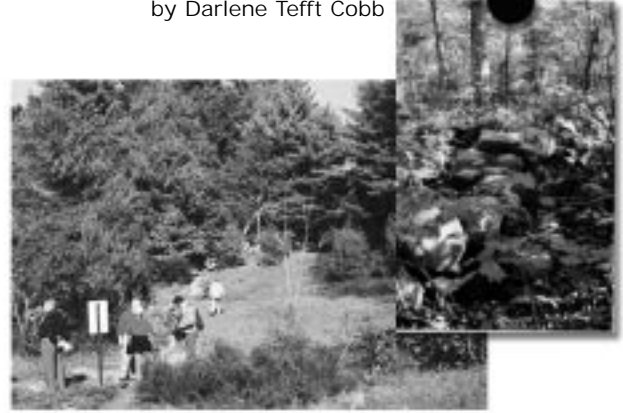
Four years ago, when a builder was about to start construction of a tract of new homes on the Tefft Homestead land, the goal was to purchase and save it from destruction. Today, a portion of the Tefft Homestead — about 28-acres containing most of the important historic features — is safely in the hands of the South Kingstown Land Trust, a nonprofit organization that seeks to preserve open space.

Since the property's purchase in March 2000, it has been renamed and is now known as the Tefft Historical Park. The state of Rhode Island, the town of South Kingstown and others in the public and private sectors have committed resources to purchase and preserve the land.

There's a long-term plan in place for protecting the historic features contained within the park and a management committee to make sure work on the property is carried out consistent with the plan. There's work going on to get the property named to the National Register of Historic Places. And there's been additional effort to raise money to take care of some immediate and future needs at the park including addressing such problems as soil erosion (drainage), restoration of natural features such as meadow grass, safety such as a covering an open water well, and access such as pathways. In short, we have the land and we have the plan. With continued funding and volunteers the natural and remaining historic features can be protected and the park can be turned into something we all can learn from and enjoy.

Contributors toward purchase of the land, and more recently to its maintenance and improvement, to date have provided what was needed to complete the purchase with about \$1,200 left over at this time to address other needs.

Recently the SKLT has learned that a \$100,000 grant, applied for last fall, has not been accepted. While this means no funding for the full range of Tefft Historic Park projects planned in 2002-2003, SKLT has announced it



Photos courtesy Kathleen Tiff Cooper

In 1999, when Tefft descendants held their first reunion in South Kingstown, R.I., the property pictured above was known to us as the Tefft Homestead. The Tefft Historical Park was born with the March 2000 purchase of the remaining 28-acres of land that once comprised the homestead. The purchase was the first step in protecting and improving the property, its stonewalls, historic cemeteries, house foundations and other archaeological features. Grants and private donations continue to be sought by the South Kingstown Land Trust to protect what is there and turn the park into something we all can learn from and enjoy.

intends to apply for a state grant to support a reduced schedule of work.

Volunteers are filling in some gaps. For instance, TFA member Henry Oately, a retired civil engineer, has provided a drainage plan for the property. Another, Brian Tefft, a natural resource expert, is working to ensure the meadow grasses and other natural elements on the property are stabilized.

More information about what's happening at the Tefft Homestead (aka Tefft Historical Park) can be found at the Tefft Family Association Web site www.geocities.com/tefft_family. Those who want to know more about the South Kingstown Land Trust or make a donation toward improvements and maintenance of the park should call 401-789-0962 or write SKLT at 313 Main Street, Suite C, Wakefield, RI 02879.

Coat

From page 1

associated with the Germans and Dutch, and meant, 'descendant of Theudofrid' (Prince of Peace)."¹

The heraldic artist of the Tefft Coat of Arms is unknown.

Considering the source

Authenticity of this coat of arms is beyond the scope of the authors of this newsletter. Based on an interpretation of the introduction in Bolton's, the following is offered by Tefft Family Association Genealogist Timothy Nathan Tefft:

Heraldry first came about circa 1164 and within 25 years was a recognized art form. From this time forward, leaders of men have assumed coats, sometimes appropriating one associated with another's family. For example, sometimes brothers would take on different coats, or a husband would use that of his wife's family.

The College of Arms was chartered in 1483, though grants of arms from the Crown and other nobility began much earlier. Members of ancient families have not always looked favorably at the College. Descendants of men who won or assumed their coats on a great medieval battlefield "will never look with favor upon arms granted by authority on payment of a fee."²

In America's colonial days, arms were often drawn by carriage painters or traveling "heraldic artists." They often performed this service for about ten dollars or perhaps bed and breakfast. Stationers then came into the picture. These coats were often done in watercolors, or done on portraits. They might be found engraved on seal rings, silver, or on a bookplate. The owners of these arms probably did not care much about their right to use them.

Bolton goes on to say that bookplates are "not often reliable heraldically," and cites the work of a Mr. French, one of the best known American engravers. If Mr. French "had an accurate knowledge of heraldry, there is little to prove it in his handsome bookplates." The Tefft Coat of Arms was taken from a bookplate.

In summary, we can't say whether Emma Augusta Tefft's bookplate representation of a Tefft Coat of Arms is authentic. So interpretation of its symbols by family historians may be a trip down the wrong road. This just happens to be the only road available to travel at the moment. And the subject itself has been

fascinating enough to draw us down the path a bit further.

A rendition

Curiosity has led us to ask what the Tefft Coat of Arms described in Bolton's might look like. Some time ago, Tefft historian A. Craig Anthony contacted artist and "Tefft-in-law" Norm Burdett for a rendition based on the description given in Bolton's. A serious historian and "lifelong amateur student of Rhode Island 17th century colonial history," Burdett responded by generously contributing a rendering in what may be a more modern style. (See sidebar, opposite page.)

"I have translated the Old French descriptive paragraph into a coat of arms," Burdett wrote in an e-mail accompanying the artwork. "All of the elements described are included and the only difference from the original would be the style of my rendering."

The art of heraldry is called blazoning, which employs a remarkably precise technical language to describe arms. Each element is described in its proper order, for instance, the field is given first, then the color or arrangement of colors, then the character of partition lines when parted, and so on.

This precision and order allows artists to render the coats today. "Descriptions of coats of arms began to be recorded in Norman times in England," Burdett says. "The language of that period is what we refer to as 'Old French.' All of these heraldic descriptions follow the same formula today, so we are able to recreate coats of arms that are centuries old accurately."

Parting word

For those researching Tefft genealogy, the subject of heraldry, coats of arms and family crests may yield new and valuable information, particularly when the surname's links back to Europe are still so misty. There are a number of Web sites offering information on this topic. Most want to sell you an authentic Tefft coat of arms rendered by latter-day versions of Bolton's Mr. French. Our humble advice—let the buyer beware!

SOURCES

1. Bolton, Charles Knowles, *Bolton's American Armory, A RECORD OF COATS OF ARMS WHICH HAVE BEEN IN USE WITHIN THE PRESENT BOUNDS OF THE UNITED STATES*, Boston, 1972, The F.W. Faxon Company. The introductory pages of Bolton's offer these words of caution: "This is a record of those coats of arms only that have been in use (some of them from the earliest Colonial times) within the bounds of the present United States. Readers whose chief interest is in 'authentic' arms or the right to bear arms must look elsewhere," page ix.
2. *Ibid*, page ix.

Two Versions

Tefft Coat of Arms (c. 1900s)

From Bolton's (courtesy Timothy Nathan Tefft)



Tefft

Tefft Coat of Arms (modern) Norman Burdett, artist

*A rendition of a Coat of Arms
used by Emma Augusta Tefft ca. 1900
as described in Bolton's American Armory*



Heraldic Description of the Tefft Coat of Arms

Quart 1 and 4: Gu 4 mullets pierced 2, 2, 1; 2 and 3: Gu a heart bet 3 mullets pierced, all argent
Crest: a boar's head couped Motto: Ubique fidelis¹

Some Definitions

gule (Gu) — To color red; to give the color of gules to. Gules are bloody.²

mullet — A bearing resembling a five-pointed star. It is sometimes called a spur rowel, but it was in use long before the rowelled spur. When used as a difference, it denotes the third son.³



heart — The human heart is sometimes borne. A case in point is the arms of the Douglass family in allusion to the mission of James Lord Douglas to the Holy Land with the heart of Robert Bruce. Douglass: "Argent, a man's heart gules, ensigned by a royal crown proper, on a chief azure two mullets of the first."⁴

NOTES:

1. Description from *Bolton's American Armory*, pg. 162.
2. *Pimbley's Dictionary of Heraldry*, www.digiserver.com/heraldry/Pimbley's Dictionary of Heraldry, Jan. 11, 2002.
3. *Ibid*
4. *Ibid*



News Briefs

FROM THE TEFFT FAMILY ASSOCIATION

What's new with TFA? — Maybe you! Total membership in the Tefft Family Association reached 130 on March 1. We welcome our new members and send heartfelt thanks to all for your support.

Members' interests — Those who enroll are asked where their chief interest lies. Here's what members answered. Most, 60, joined because they have an interest in genealogy and history. Thirty-six members indicated they want to participate in preserving the Tefft Homestead. Preservation of Tefft cemeteries attracted 31 members. And 24 said they were most interested in attending family reunions.

Where do members call home? — Most of our members live in the continental United States with 31 states represented. We have heard from Tefft descendants as far away as Hawaii, Canada and Australia. To date, the state of Rhode Island has provided us with the most members who are descended from John or William Tefft. Seventeen hail from Rhode Island, followed by 15 from the state of New York. California and Florida come in neck and neck with ten apiece. By the way, the most common spelling of the last name continues to be Tefft, however, 8 percent spell the name Tift or Tift.

Are you a member? — Membership has its privileges. At this time, only those enrolled as a member of the TFA and current with their dues for 2002 will continue to receive the quarterly newsletter.

If you have a question about your membership, please e-mail, call or write Membership Chairperson Lori Horton at LHorton@LHorton.com; 401-782-2078; 99 Stonehenge Rd., Kingston, RI 02881.

Those with access to the Internet can enroll on the TFA Web site. Follow the link listed under the Main Menu on the homepage. The address for the TFA Web site is www.geocities.com/tefft_family.

Want to know more?

Visit the Tefft Family Association Web site at www.geocities.com/tefft_family

E-mail
Darlene Tefft Cobb at dcobb@antelecom.net

Write us at:
3535 West Ave. J-13,
Lancaster, CA
93536-6320

A brief look at TFA's progress

Established in Oct. 1999, the Tefft Family Association continues to make progress in building membership and accomplishing goals intended to benefit members and preserve Tefft history. Here's a brief look at what's been done to date:

1. Formed a family association with a current membership of 130. We started with about 30.
2. Held our third family reunion in Rhode Island in 2001 with a fourth planned Oct. 12-14, 2002.
3. Helped spearhead and finance the purchase and preservation of the 225-year-old Tefft Homestead, turn it into the Tefft Historical Park, and provide for its long-term management and maintenance.
4. Expanded our knowledge of Tefft genealogy and established a genealogy e-mail service — the Tefft-L list — to exchange information on our research. The Tefft-L list hovers at around 80 to 85 subscribers and inquiries about Tefft genealogy are made at the rate of about one to two a week.
5. Established and upgraded the Tefft Family Association Web site. Since May 2000, when we first started counting, there have been over 10,000 hits on the various pages at the site. We know that Teffts are diligent researchers, since the most popular page on the site is "Resources."
6. Developed a quarterly newsletter that covers topics of interest to Tefft descendants. Seven issues have been published to date.



Spotting connections

For the advanced Tefftologist — and an easy tip for all — it is quite possible to generally narrow down several of the “loose ends” in your genealogical database by identifying naming patterns that have become traditional in certain branches. For instance, it is reasonable to conclude from the Vermont list of Tefft ancestors in the 1800s that *Peter, Moses, Rufus*, etc., are most likely descendants of Joshua Tefft through Rhode Island ancestors of the same name. Certain names were common to only one branch of the family. Of course, this is only a generality and many names are just too obscure to make this connection.

— A. Craig Anthony

What is the origin and meaning of the Tefft name?

The name “Tefft” or “Tefft” is Saxon and means, “a piece of ground where there has been a house,” according to the *Etymological Dictionary of Family and Christian Names*. More poetically, it is a place where a house once stood, which takes on a somewhat ironic, almost melancholy, meaning in light of the efforts to save the Tefft Homestead and its near loss.

The following is an abstract from a letter written by Benjamin F. Tefft, D.D., LL.D. (a descendant of Joshua Tefft) to Parker W. Tefft of Chicago in the latter part of the nineteenth century:

While in London on a mission for the United States Government, I employed some one to hunt up the family name in England. The result was the following: The family originally belonged to the French Huguenots when the spelling of the name was “Thevet” and pronounced as if spelled “Tevay.” The family and many others were driven out of France by the St. Bartholomew Massacre, and came to England. The Teffts of this country undoubtedly came from (Lincolnshire) England.

Source: William Arthur, A.M., Maria E. (Maxon) Tift

Idaho recognizes Tefft Century Farm

The great-grandsons of Bertrum Walter Tefft, (1867-1940), from left, brothers J. Perry, Jerry and James, accepted the Idaho State Historical Society's Century Farm award for the family's 160-acre homestead near Cul de Sac, Idaho. Born in Elgin, Ill., Bertrum settled on the property in 1886 and was granted the land patent in 1893. The homestead documents were signed by Presidents Grover Cleveland and Theodore Roosevelt. The award was presented last year.



J. Perry, Jerry and James Tefft, March 2001



Your ANCESTORS' descendants have been LOOKING FOR YOU!



The Tefft Family Association welcomes new members. Benefits include the TFA quarterly newsletter and information of interest to genealogists, historians and others who are curious about Teffts, Tiffts, and other spellings of the surname. For more information, visit our Web site at www.geocities.com/tefft_family.
Come out of hiding to join us.

Just complete the enrollment form below and mail to:

The Tefft Family Association
3535 West Avenue J-13
Lancaster, CA 93536

About the Tefft Family Association

Who can join?

Descendants of John Tefft (Tift) of Rhode Island and his brother, William Teffe of Boston, including all the various spellings of the Tefft surname.

Others who wish to join as associate members are also welcome.

What are the annual dues?

Dues are \$10 per year/per member.

Contributions to cover mailing costs and other organizational costs for the TFA would also be greatly appreciated.

The TFA has not yet filed for nonprofit status.

Tefft Family Association Individual Membership Enrollment - 2002

1. Your name _____

2. Mailing address _____
Street _____
City/State/Zip _____

3. Home phone _____ 4. Business phone _____

5. E-mail address _____

6. Are you a Tefft descendant? Yes No Unsure

7. Are you applying for membership as a family (Tefft descendant) or associate member?
 Tefft descendant Associate member

8. My primary interest in joining the TFA is: (please check one ONLY)
 Preserving Tefft Homestead Attending Reunions Researching Genealogy Preserving Tefft Cemeteries Other _____

9. In addition to my annual membership dues of \$10, I wish to make a contribution to the TFA in support of the following:
 Management of Tefft Historic Park in South Kingstown, R.I. Unspecified Dues ONLY at this time

Please make checks payable to the Tefft Family Association

Thank you! Please mail to: TFA Enrollment, 3535 West Avenue J-13, Lancaster, CA 93536

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