

# It's in the genes: Gresham man researches past

Bill Leslie learns to know his family in the pages of The Outlook

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Bill Leslie took up genealogy and discovered relatives he didn't know he had. Then he began to realize he had names and dates, but relatives he still didn't know. For that, he turned to the pages of The Gresham Outlook.

Though Leslie will never meet his long-dead relatives, at least not in this lifetime, he knows a bit more about what they were like, how they spent their Sundays and who they were by reading of their activities in the "Gresham Locals." The Locals were long columns of neighborhood information once a mainstay of The Outlook's back pages.

While many people research obituaries and death notices, Leslie points out that community newspapers, such as The Outlook, provide the means to flesh out the folks on a family tree.

At the Mt. Hood Community College library, Leslie pulls down a volume of 1929 papers and runs his finger down paragraphs of local chit-chat, birthday parties, who had who to dinner, wedding and baby showers, card parties, until he finds a familiar name.

"They were really plugged in," he says, when he reads that his family entertained members of the St. Clair family, founders of The Outlook.

The old news he reads in The Outlook is new news to him. Leslie, a Sandy resident who is a controller for Gresham Toyota, is a throw-back, odd man out in a family that has not paid much attention to ancestry. Just knowing what questions to ask has been a challenge.

When he reads an Outlook news item that leads him to believe that his father's grandfather built a house

for his father's grandmother, even though the parties in question were not then related, he goes to his dad and asks if so-and-so built houses.

"Well, now that I think of it..." comes the answer and Leslie fit in another piece of his ancestral puzzle.

In the same way, he found the Bluff Road home where his great-grandparents, George and Mary Jane Leslie, first lived. He knows where the family had a beach home and he cherishes evidence of their hospitality.

On Dec. 29, 1911, The Outlook printed this piece about his great-grandmother: "Mrs. George Leslie acquired such a good reputation as a hostess Thanksgiving that the Wostell, Hevel and Zeek families with George Leslie Jr. from Portland swooped down upon her again Christmas day and again left the cupboard bare."

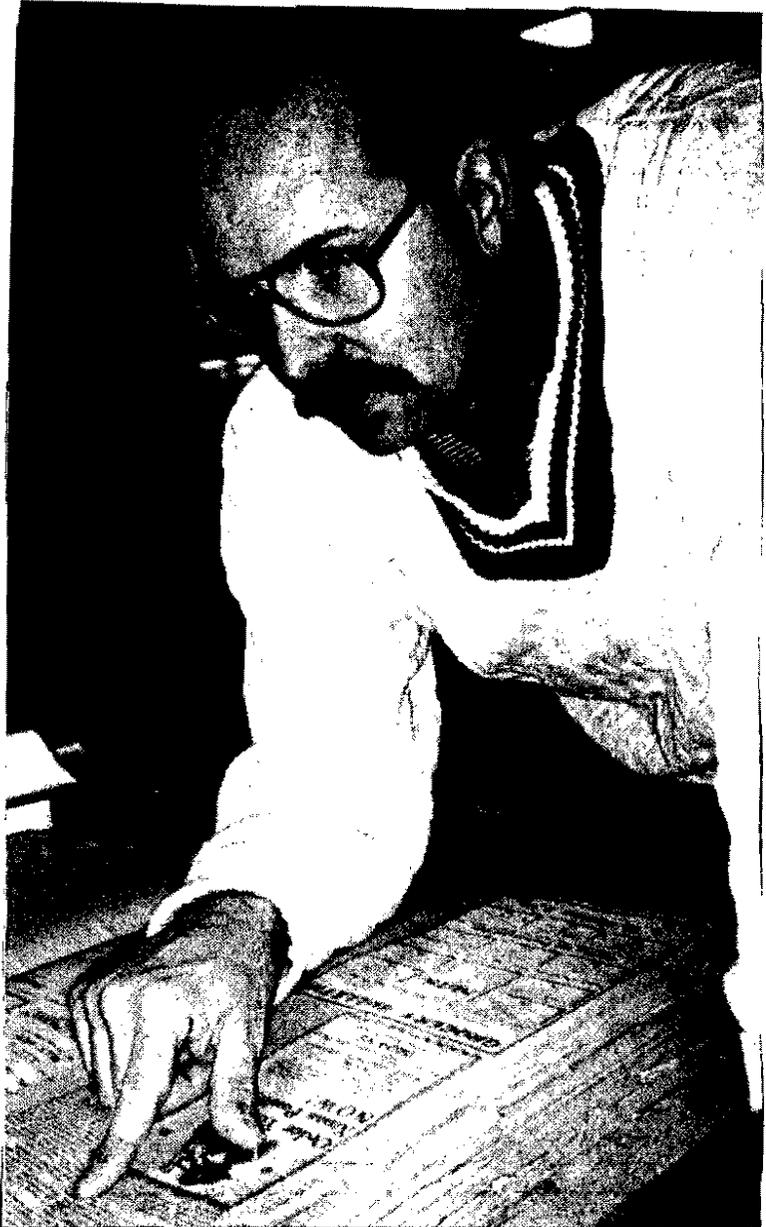
"Nobody keeps track of this kind of stuff anymore," he says, of The Outlook's newsy little items, often contributed by correspondents who wrote for 10 cents an inch. "There are too many of us anymore to keep this kind of daily record of life and we don't have that kind of time."

A self-taught genealogist, Leslie has built his family tree branch by branch. The result has been that his children, ages 7 and 6, when learning about the Dutch settlement of New York, can claim a grandfather many generations back who was part of the action.

Leslie keeps his family tree on computer, and recently, after the death of his wife's grandmother, made a record of her life with photos to give to each of the woman's descendants. It is a gift of memory that no one else can duplicate.

Leslie spends about 100 hours a year on his hobby, working at it in spurts.

"Sometimes you won't get anything," he says, talking about days when the trail is cold. "And then you find the tiny little date. It's like a treasure hunt."



Bill Leslie tracks his ancestors and their social lives through back editions of The Gresham Outlook at the Mt. Hood Community College library.