

Relatively speaking: BC3 noncredit courses focus on ancestors, family storytelling

Sept. 10, 2020



William Knox, of Mars, and the seventh William Knox in his family dating to 1793 and to Kilmacow, Ireland, is shown Aug. 27 holding an April 16, 1893, photograph taken of his great-grandparents, Michael and Bridget McMullen, and their children in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. Second from left in the photograph is Grace McMullen, William Knox's grandmother. Knox will teach "Share Your Family History through Short Stories" as part of Butler County Community College's noncredit Lifelong Learning classes this fall.

(Butler, PA) Nadine Neff has found she is the blood relative of some 51,488 living people – and of the late Teunis Couvers, born in 1635 and in what is now Brooklyn, N.Y.

William Knox has discovered he's the seventh William Knox in eight family generations dating to a William Knox born in 1793 in Kilmacow, Ireland, and who possibly farmed wheat and barley to sell to a brewery near his home.

"Genealogy is growing tremendously," Knox said of a hobby that hobby that gained in popularity with the advent of websites that debuted in the 1990s and that trails only gardening as

Americans' favorite, according to 2014 reports published in USA Today and aired on ABC News.

Neff, of Chicora, and Knox, of Mars, will help students attending noncredit Lifelong Learning courses to be held on Butler County Community College's main campus in Butler Township to find their own Teunis Couverses and William Knoxes.



Neff's "Ancestry-An Introduction" will be held from 9 a.m. to noon Oct. 17 in BC3's Continuing Education Building. The \$35 course will teach students how to create an account on a genealogical website and construct their family tree by reviewing the types of documents that are available.

Nadine Neff, of Chicora, is shown with a notebook displaying a portion of her family tree Aug. 27 and on Butler County Community College's main campus in Butler Township. Neff will teach "Ancestry-An Introduction" as part of BC3's noncredit Lifelong Learning classes this fall.

Knox's "Share Your Family History through Short Stories" will be held from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. Oct. 26, Nov. 2, Nov. 9 and Nov. 16 in BC3's Humanities and Education Building. The \$49 course will teach students who have gathered information about relatives through genealogical websites or other sources to personalize their relatives' life stories in a way that will interest readers.

Director: Everyone curious about ancestors

"I think everyone is curious about where they came from," said Paul Lucas, director of BC3's Lifelong Learning.

BC3's genealogical courses "start with getting started," Lucas said. "How do you start your research? How do you know where to look? And then once you gain more and more information about your family, it's a nice way to then take the class about writing so that you can put those stories into perspective, so that you don't just have a stack or a pile or a spreadsheet of information."

The genealogical courses are among more than 100 selections offered this fall by BC3's Lifelong Learning, whose classes can help students enrich their personal lives by expanding their knowledge and skills, Lucas said.

Before the debut of genealogical websites, those intent on learning about their ancestors may have had no alternative but the “old way,” Knox said. “Getting on a plane and going over to the old country and digging through basements of churches, or relying on the fading memory of older relatives.”

Churches, Neff said, are where most records were kept.

“If some of the churches were gone, well, where did their records go? It would be a lot of legwork,” Neff said. “The big thing would also be a language barrier. It’s not like you are going to go over there and everybody speaks English and can say, ‘All right. I’ll help you.’”

Neff has more than 51,488 living people with whom shares DNA, according to ancestry tests she has taken. And for 1,466 of those living relatives, “We are fourth cousins,” Neff said, “or closer.”

Teunis Couvers, husband of the former Jannitze Brokaw and father of the couple’s eight children, passed away in 1720 at age 85 in Millstone, N.J. Couvers is Neff’s eighth great-grandfather.

“I would be curious what they did for a living,” Neff said. “You can guess a farmer, but do you know that for sure?”

William Knox, he of Kilmacow, Ireland, and husband of Anastacia, had three or four sons and died at age 83 in 1876.

Knox said he doubts he would have any similarities to his namesake eight generations removed.

“None, none,” he said. “I don’t start to find any similarities in physical characteristics or personality traits until a generation or two above me. That reflects the growth of the family coming from farmers in the motherland to modern-day people.”

Social distancing measures will be enforced to maintain a safe environment at all BC3 facilities. Additionally, face coverings, such as a face mask or face shield, must be worn in shared spaces inside BC3 facilities and cover the nose and mouth. Face masks are preferred, but face shields are acceptable.

For more information or to view a complete list of BC3’s fall 2020 Lifelong Learning courses, visit bc3.edu/lifelong or call 724-284-8504.