

STARTING WITH A BRACELET AND A FAMILY TREE

*How Family
Artifacts
Inspired and
Informed My
Genealogical
Search*



When I was young, I avidly studied the family tree created by my maternal grandfather. I was particularly fascinated with the names of the children of Loum Snow and his wife, Abby Harris Easton (Mowry) of New Bedford, Massachusetts, written across the tree in birth order like a string of pearls: Abby Mowry, Susan Swift, Loum, Helen Throckmorton, Isabel Mowry, Annie Dorcas, Jennie Sherson, Elizabeth Easton, and Robert.

In my teens I became steward of a different family artifact, a simple gold bracelet, a plain band whose inside was inscribed with a name, date, and three sets of initials. Decades later, these two items became the platform from which I expanded my family knowledge.

The gold bracelet

The inscription inside the plain band reads: *Sally Taber, December 9 1832–1882 SGT SHS SHB*. Although my mother, Sally Hunt Blackman (SHB), had given me some information, by the time I really became curious my mother had died. I knew little about the bracelet's earliest owner, other than that SGT was Sally (Gordon) Taber. The second owner, judging by the initials, was my great-grandmother, Sarah Gordon (Hunt) Snow (SHS), but what was her relationship to Sally (Gordon) Taber? To my disappointment, no Tabers were listed on our family tree. Was Sally the mother of Sarah? Both women carried the Gordon name but their connection was not clear to me, so resolving that mystery was the first step in my genealogical research.

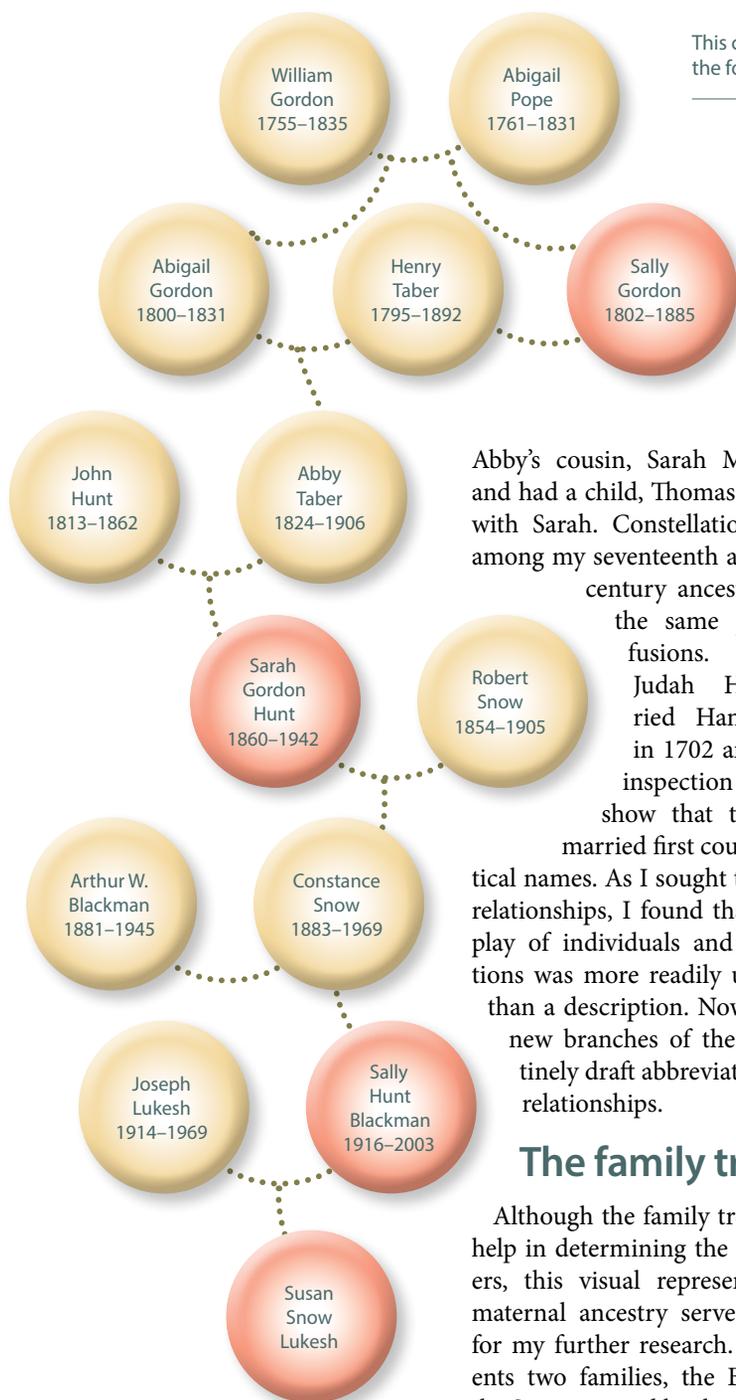
After tracing Sarah Gordon (Hunt) Snow's family, using a variety of sources (see page 46), I determined the relationship. Sally (Gordon) Taber (1802–1885) was the second wife of Capt. Henry Taber (1795–1892). Captain Taber's first wife was Sally's older sister, Abigail (Nabby) Gordon (1800–1831), with whom he had three children. In 1831, a month after giving birth to her third child,

Nabby died. A year later, on December 9, 1832, Captain Taber married Nabby's sister Sally. This second marriage offered the practical benefit of giving Captain Taber's three young children a stepmother who was also their aunt and, presumably, well known to them. In 1855, Abby Taber, the second-born child and only daughter of Henry and Nabby (Gordon) Taber, married John Hunt. Abby's only child, Sarah Gordon Hunt, was born in 1860, two years before John Hunt died of consumption.

Sally (Gordon) Taber was the first owner of the gold bracelet. In 1882, she and Henry Taber celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary, which explains the inscription *December 9, 1832–1882*. The bracelet may well have been an anniversary gift. The initials suggest that the bracelet passed to Sally's step-granddaughter and great-niece, Sarah Gordon Hunt, who married Robert Snow in 1881 and acquired the initials SHS. Sarah (Hunt) Snow gave the bracelet to her granddaughter, my mother, Sally Hunt Blackman (SHB). One possible reason for the two generational skips may have been the longevity of the

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This chart illustrates the family relationships between the four bracelet holders (noted in rose).



Abby's cousin, Sarah Marsh Gordon, and had a child, Thomas Gordon Hunt, with Sarah. Constellations of families among my seventeenth and eighteenth-century ancestors also show the same potential confusions. For instance, Judah Hopkins married Hannah Freeman in 1702 and 1720. Close inspection of the records show that the same man married first cousins with identical names. As I sought to untangle the relationships, I found that a visual display of individuals and their connections was more readily understandable than a description. Now, as I research new branches of the family, I routinely draft abbreviated diagrams of relationships.

The family tree

Although the family tree offered little help in determining the bracelet's owners, this visual representation of my maternal ancestry served as the basis for my further research. The tree presents two families, the Blackmans and the Snows, joined by the marriage of my grandparents, Arthur and Constance (Snow) Blackman. Initially prepared and hand-drawn by my grandfather, the chart was subsequently updated by his son, Arthur, Jr. The tree begins with each family's earliest immigrants: Rev. Adam Blackman (1598-1765) and Jane (____) (c. 1600-1674) and Nicholas Snow (1599/1600-1670) and Constance Hopkins (1606-1677). Given its large size—two feet by three feet—the chart was kept rolled up and taken out whenever I wanted to view it.

bracelet owners—Sally (Gordon) Taber lived to be 83 and Sarah (Hunt) Snow lived to be 82.

As I researched, I learned how multiple marriages within a small group of families and the use of the same given names—and surnames that have become middle names—can be misleading. In addition to sisters Abigail and Sally Gordon marrying Henry Taber, there was further intermarriage in the next generation. Abby Taber's husband, John Hunt, was first married to

The first task I undertook was to “prove” and improve the dates on the family tree (see page 46). Another effort was to trace the families of the women who married into the Snow line back to their earliest immigrant ancestors. Swifts, Eastons, Tabers, Popes, Hunts, and Coggeshalls arrived in the early seventeenth century, and Gordons in the early eighteenth century.

Tracing the women's families did more than illuminate family relationships and highlight family constellations within the southeastern Massachusetts communities of Plymouth, Eastham, Rochester, and New Bedford in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries. This research also showed that the middle names of the daughters of Loum Snow (1810-1871) and Abby Harris Easton (Mowry) Snow (1811-1885)—Abby Mowry, Susan Swift, Helen Throckmorton, Isabel Mowry, Annie Dorcas, Jennie Sherson, and Elizabeth Easton—refer to ancestors. I knew that Easton and Mowry were part of Abby's own name, and I discovered that Easton was Abby's mother's surname; Mowry was her father's. Swift was Loum Snow's mother's maiden surname; Throckmorton was the surname of Patience Throckmorton, an ancestor of Abby's mother; and Dorcas was the given name of Abby's mother, Dorcas Easton. The origins of all but one of the middle names of Abby's daughters are now known. I have not yet found the source of Sherson, or Harris in Abby's own name.

The names of Abby's daughters point primarily to female ancestors—from her mother (Dorcas [Easton] Mowry) and aunt (Elizabeth Easton) to Patience Throckmorton, five generations earlier. Loum and Abby followed the colonial New England practice of naming the first son for the paternal relative and the first daughter for a maternal relative. I wonder if Abby used the names of her children to preserve ancestral knowledge, much as her contemporaries did with painted or embroidered family records.



Top: The five daughters of Loum and Abby Harris Easton (Mowry) Snow who lived to adulthood. (left to right): Susan Swift, Helen Throckmorton, Isabel Mowry, Annie Dorcas, and Jennie Sherson, circa 1865–70. Bottom: Abby Harris Easton (Mowry) Snow (1811–1885), circa 1865–70. Both images courtesy of Deborah (Snow) Simonds.

the Rural Cemetery of New Bedford) on *FindAGrave.com*. I also met my mother's cousin, Deborah (Snow) Simonds, now 91, and visited the Rural Cemetery with her. And most wonderfully, she shared two photographs, one of them of the five Snow sisters who lived to adulthood. Deborah's many remembrances of her grandmother and aunts has made their world come alive for me.

Lessons learned

A few short years ago I started with a family tree, a bracelet, and many questions. Today I know whose initials are on the bracelet and how those women fit into my family. I have also greatly expanded our genealogy, especially by tracing the patrilineal ancestors of wives and by learning to pay attention to the clues found within names. My grandfather left a wonderful family tree but its branches needed strengthening (i.e., proof and expansion). I discovered our Throckmorton line—which I'm certain my grandfather never knew about—and that led to Coggeshalls and Eastons. Through Coggeshalls and Throckmortons I now know that an ancestral line extends back for centuries in England. Finally, I have also seen first hand how living relatives, as well as physical artifacts, offer keys to finding our ancestors and reconstructing their lives.

Pursuing the meanings behind that string of wonderful names, so magical to me as a child, has added much to my knowledge of these ancestral families and to an understanding of their larger communities. The children of Loum and Abby Harris Easton (Mowry) Snow have become far more to me than names alone. I have recorded the gravestones of Loum and Abby and their nine children (all buried in the Snow family plot in

A note on sources

Volume 6 of *Mayflower Families through Five Generations* (family of Stephen Hopkins) covered the first four generations of Snows. *The Great Migration Begins* (Boston: NEHGS, 1995) and the most recent edition of Martin Hollick's *New Englanders in the 1600s* (Boston: NEHGS, 2012) offered useful information. Vital records of southeastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island towns were accessed through *AmericanAncestors.org*, *Ancestry.com*, *FamilySearch.org*, and the New York Public Library. Local histories of New Bedford and Bristol County, Massachusetts;

family genealogies (Mayo, Freeman, Coggeshall, Throckmorton, Hunt, Taber, and Swift) available at the NEHGS Library and on various websites; and other online and print sources proved useful. College alumni notes from Harvard University provided an important detail not found elsewhere. Public family trees, usually with few, if any, citations, nonetheless offered directions to pursue. And *FindAGrave.com* helped locate cemeteries, confirm birth and death dates, and identify additional family members, spouses, parents, and siblings.