

Forward to Hamil's 1932 Manuscript

Other than photocopies of a dozen or more pages, I have never seen a copy of Lura Coolley Hamil's 1955 posthumously-published book, *A Story of Pioneering*. Previous interlibrary loan requests found no circulating copies. But I recently placed another ILL request through Humboldt State University, where I am now attending classes. What I received from the Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield was an unexpected surprise: Hamil's original 1932 manuscript!

Hamil's work has come under close scrutiny in recent years. Her thesis, that several Cooley families were descended from a New York Dutch family named Cool (and various spellings), has been seriously challenged by recent DNA evidence. We now know, for example, that the Fayette County Pennsylvania and the Howard County Missouri Cooleys—the principal families Hamil writes about—are not patrilineally related to one another; they do not share the same paternal ancestors. We also now know that the Cool family is a distinctly different DNA type than either Cooley group.

But the DNA evidence is not all that disproves Hamil's claims. Her work is riddled with errors, inaccurate citations and unfounded speculation. For example, on page 23 (as displayed in this PDF document), Hamil says that Charles E. Stickney's *History of the Minisink Region* (1867) "frequently refers to William Cooley and his sons." However, there is not a single reference to William in Stickney's book. Likewise, Hamil makes several references to an 1823 will for John Cooley of Kent County, Maryland, who she describes as William's son and founder of the Fayette County Cooleys. But the Kent County Clerk has assured me that no such record exists. Furthermore, Hamil states that this same John Cooley married, as his second wife, Elizabeth Firmin. The *Biographical & Portrait Cyclopaedia, Fayette County, Pennsylvania* (1889), however, says that Elizabeth was married to William Cooley—the couple being the grandparents of the subject of the sketch, another

John Cooley. The veracity of the 1889 statement is backed up by the presence of the pair, living near their sons, on the 1810 census of Fayette County, and by the record of their deaths in the family bible of son Jonathan Cooley. (William died in 1817, Elizabeth in 1837.)

Although the connections Hamil made among the early Cooleys is erroneous—almost to the person—she did transcribe some primary documentation and early letters. She wrote some interesting biographical sketches about a number of her relatives and, although errors have been noted, she appears to have drawn the lineages of the families within a couple of generations of her own with a degree of accuracy. Nevertheless, contemporary research and DNA has shown that Hamil's vision of a larger Cooley tribe is wrong. With this knowledge, we can now proceed toward putting together more accurate portrayals of our various Cooley ancestries.

Notes About the Manuscript

Hamil's manuscript was in my possession for only a few weeks. I knew that I would never see it again and would likely never see the rare 1955 publication, so I hastily photographed the eighty year-old pages with a small digital camera using standard household lighting. The results are far from professional; however, the quality is not much worse than the yellowed and faded pages themselves. The accompanying PDF may be substandard but it is usable.

Most pages have numbers penciled in, but they're not consistent. Up to ten numbers have been skipped at a time and others repeated. Blank sheets, which I did not photograph, had been inserted periodically. I have no opinion as to whether pages are missing or that some reshuffling of the manuscript hadn't occurred in the past, but I am confident that I have photographed everything in the correct sequence. Additionally, handwritten notations are found throughout. It's obvious that some of it was added during the twenty year period between Hamil's death in

1933 and the manuscript's publication in 1955. These entries were evidently made by the cousins who prepared the book. Much of the rest is clearly Hamil's own handwriting.

The manuscript has several dozens more pages than the published work. They are comprised almost exclusively of a genealogy of Hamil's maternal lines. To my knowledge, none of this appears in the 1955 edition. It is my hope that some of the material will prove helpful to researchers looking at those lineages.

A Note About Referenced Material

Online Cooley DNA information can be found at ftdna.com. My attempts to clarify the data can be found at johncooley.net. Copies of *The History of the Minisink Region* and the *Biographical & Portrait Cyclopedia, Fayette County, Pennsylvania* are found at Google Books. (I'd be happy to forward the URLs. Send an email to me via the contact page at newssummer.com.) And contemporary information about the New York Dutch Cools is recorded in Richard H. Benson's *The Barent Jacobsen Cool Family* (2001).

Because Hamil's work is often cited by descendants of John Cooley of Stokes County, North Carolina—despite the obvious disconnect to the material—discussion about it is welcomed at the John Cooley Mailing List, presently archived at <http://johncooley.net/list/>.

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