



Hereditary Fortnight in Washington

Heralded by Spring

Brantley Carter Bolling Knowles

JUST AS TULIPS, DAFFODILS, and cherry blossoms cloak Washington in delicate floral beauty, spring heralds the arrival of hereditary lineage groups to the District of Columbia. Since the mid-20th century, dozens of societies have descended upon Washington for two weeks in mid-April. This series of events is known as Hereditary Fortnight.

Through the decades these societies have ebbed and flowed. Those that have remained relevant, and those with an

enduring mission, remain. Many of these societies were founded in the late 19th century, while some were formed as recently as in the last decade. The common thread is that the societies which meet during this time all require direct or collateral descent, proven with primary source documentation from a qualifying ancestor.

Many of these groups have formal meetings only once yearly... exclusively in Washington. Other large national, even international groups, such as the

Jamestowne Society, the Society of Mayflower Descendants, and the Colonial Dames of America meet with much greater frequency but host events during Hereditary Fortnight, ensuring a presence in the spring celebration of shared history and heritage.

With the advent of the internet with its tools to aid research, with the emergence of DNA testing, and with the popularity of television programs featuring genealogy, hereditary lineage societies have become



Previous Page: White carnations/silver at the One Hundred.
 Top: Miss Emily Tilghman and fiancé Robert Pond Vivian, Junior Governor of the Society of Colonial Wars in New Jersey.
 Above: Karen McClendon, President of Americans of Armorial Ancestry, and Walter Sheffield.

ever more relevant. Membership is not moribund, instead it is surging. Importantly, all of these lineage groups embrace and preserve diverse parts of history often ignored in the public domain.

The umbrella organization that brings together all of these lineage groups is the Hereditary Society Community (HSC— www.hereditary.us), which was founded by lineage luminary and wunderkind Barry Christopher Howard. When asked what was the catalyst for forming HSC, Howard states:

HSC was conceived based upon a deficit in synergy, public interface, and knowledge management, all within the sphere of genealogical research and historical education in the United States.

In 2003 Howard created and designed the award-winning website, which, through HSC, provides an important online resource to the public, including chronological precedence listings, membership requirements, meeting schedules, insignia and insignia protocol, and links to those societies with their own websites.

Each year HSC hosts a “by invitation only” gala at an historic venue, attended by hereditary society leadership, benefactors, and supporters. At the yearly event, which is the cynosure of Hereditary

Fortnight, HSC recognizes those who have made important contributions to the world of genealogy, research, and leadership within the lineage community. All recipients and their accomplishments are posted on a personalized webpage on the HSC website, which also includes their

detailed biographies.

For many years, the venue for HSC was the McKim, Mead & White-designed Patterson House, formerly the Washington Club, on Dupont Circle. Most recently the HSC was held at Anderson House on Massachusetts Avenue, the beaux-arts period home of Isabel and Larz Anderson, society and diplomatic fixtures of the Gilded Age. The Andersons belonged to prominent hereditary lineage societies, and bequeathed their palatial residence to the Society of the Cincinnati, to which Ambassador Anderson belonged. Anderson House is now the headquarters, historic house museum, and research library of the Society of the Cincinnati, a patriotic lineage group founded in 1783.

Some groups embrace royal heritage. A *grande dame* of the royal societies is the National Society of Americans of Royal Descent (NSARD), founded in Georgetown (Washington, DC). The founders were representatives of early “cave dweller” families, a soubriquet for those families that have been in Washington and Georgetown since the earliest days of our young American Republic.

In 1908, Miss Sally Somervell Mackall of Mackall Square, and then nonagenarian Britannia Wellington Peter Kennon (Mrs. Beverly Kennon) of Tudor Place, jointly founded NSARD. Mrs. Kennon was a well-known and revered descendant of Martha Custis Washington. Miss Mackall, a well-born society doyenne, became founding president, with Mrs. Kennon as honorary president.

A history of the NSARD states:

The Society’s founders sought to encourage research into colonial genealogy and the royal ancestry of our nation’s earliest families...and to educate others regarding the character and accomplishments of these ancestors.

In 1936 the NSARD was recognized by the College of Arms, London, and the arms of the Society was thus enrolled. The genealogist general of NSARD is one of only 50 fellows of the American Society

of Genealogists (FASG). An important initiative of the NSARD is a project to underwrite the cost of digitizing numerous 16th-century British chancery records from London’s National Archives. Nearly 5,000 documents, covering the years 1515-1529, have been completed in the project’s first year. This endeavor will greatly aid, not only the public, but also genealogists pursuing documentation of the British origins of American families. During April’s Hereditary Fortnight, NSARD has an annual meeting, a festive mint julep reception, and luncheon at a private country club in nearby Maryland, always with a well-known lecturer.

In AD 802, Charlemagne—Emperor Charles the Great (742-814)—instituted a chivalric order known as The Order of the Crown of Charlemagne, which was maintained through many centuries by his descendants. In 1939, Baron Marcelus Donald R. von Redlich organized the Order in America, now known as The Order of the Crown of Charlemagne in the United States of America (OCC). The Order publishes esoteric newsletters and books, and gives when merited the Timothy Field Beard FASG Award, in recognition of outstanding contributions to the field of medieval royal and noble genealogy. A formal reception and dinner is held at a private club in Washington, always with an illuminating speaker. Direct descent from Charlemagne must be proven through any of his ten known wives or concubines.

Members of the Order of the Merovingian Dynasty (OMD) must trace their lineage to an even earlier period than Charlemagne. As stated in the organization’s roster, “The Order of the Merovingian Dynasty was conceived of and organized in September 2004 by twenty-three Founder Members whose names denote leadership in the field of genealogy to honor the heritage of the Merovingian Kings, the first of which was Merovee who governed the Salic Franks from 448-457.”

Charlemagne himself was a descendant



of Merovee; therefore, there is much “cross-pollination” between the OCC and OMD. The Cornelia “Nellie” Smith Isenhour Memorial Scholarship consists of two scholarships awarded yearly by OMD. Exceptional students majoring in archaeology are recommended by Dr. Brian Rose, professor of archaeology at the University of Pennsylvania. OMD has a yearly luncheon meeting and speaker at the historic City Tavern Club in Georgetown, which was once an 18th-century tavern.

One Hundred Living Descendants of Blood Royal, known as “The One Hundred,” meets annually in Washington,

Above: Deborah Wilhite (left) and Brantley Knowles, Regent-One Hundred Living Descendants of Blood Royal, greeting one another at soiree.
 Below: (l-r) David von Nirschl, Former Governor of the Society of Colonial Wars in Washington, DC; Peter I.C. Knowles, II, Registrar General, Society of Colonial Wars; Brian White, Governor of the Society of Colonial Wars in Illinois; J.P. Beall.

usually with a formal reception and dinner, featuring an illustrious speaker. Gifts are made each year to royal restorations or cathedrals. Past recipients have been St. George’s Chapel at Windsor (England), Lincoln Cathedral (England), and statuary restoration at Versailles in France. The president of the Descendants



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Above: (l-r) Lineage luminaries awaiting introduction by Mrs. Knowles: David Trebing, Governor General of The Society of Colonial Wars; Molly Carey, President, The National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in Virginia; Anna Duff, National President of The National Society of the Colonial Dames of America; Sharon Vaino, President General, The Colonial Dames of America.
Bottom: (l-r) Laura Ramsay; Timothy Finton; Tonya Finton; Laurie Aldinger, Treasurer, Order of the Crown of Charlemagne in the United States.

of the Knights of the Garter receives an honorary membership during his or her term of office. In 2017, in a break from tradition, “The One Hundred” hosted a Golden Bal Royale, with cocktails, dinner



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and dancing at a private club near Dupont Circle.

The Baronial Order of the Magna Charta (BOMC) was founded in 1898 as The Baronial Order of Runnymede. Prospective members must be able to prove direct lineal descent from one of the 25 Sureties who upheld the terms of the 1215 Magna Carta. Descent may also be proven from one of the five counselors of King John, who were sympathetic to the sealing of the “Great Charter.” BOMC has a broad and relevant mission supporting education regarding all things pertaining to Magna Carta. The group also supports a significant scholarship at the Washington and

Lee University School of Law (Virginia), as well as supporting both the Magna Carta Trust and the Lincoln Cathedral Foundation. An annual breakfast meeting with a speaker, and scholarship bestowal, is held at a private club in Washington. An additional yearly meeting is held in the Philadelphia area.

Many lineage groups who meet during Hereditary Fortnight preserve 17th-, 18th-, or 19th-century American history. The oldest of the societies with a lineage component is the Ancient Heraldic and Chivalric Order of Albion (known as “Albion”), which was instituted in 1643 by Sir Edmund Plowden (1590-1659), who was Lord Earl Palatine, Governor and Captain General of the Province of New Albion. New Albion comprised portions of what is now New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland and Virginia. The Order was reorganized in 1883 and in 2011.

Hereditary membership in Albion is limited to direct lineal descendants of Sir Edmund Plowden; an original member of the Order; or an ancestor from a family of known hereditary peerage who settled, during the 17th century, on land within the proposed Province of New Albion in North America, and whose progeny rendered distinguished and official service in founding the United States of America. In recent years, Albion has met on special weekends in Charleston, SC, Shepherdstown, WV, or during Hereditary Fortnight with a cocktail buffet at the Hay-Adams Hotel, in the magnificent Zuber-papered Concorde Room.

In 1896, Miss Mary Cabell Richardson of Kentucky founded the Hereditary Order of Descendants of Colonial Governors (HODCG). Being a descendant of a Colonial governor is one of the most sought-after designations in all of genealogy. Many Colonial governors were English peers who never came to the Colonies; therefore, the gene pool from which to draw is quite small. Many Colonial governors were armigerous and had distinguished royal ancestry. A Colonial

governor’s service must have occurred between 1607 and July 4, 1776, in a colony that ultimately comprised the thirteen original colonies, later the United States, with lineal descent proven through primary source documentation. Each spring in Washington, HODCG hosts an annual luncheon and speaker at a private club, as well as an evening cultivation reception each November in New York. An annual scholarship is given to a student majoring in archival studies, with other projects and contributions considered individually.

The Order of the Indian Wars of the United States (OIWUS) was organized in Chicago, IL, on June 10, 1896. The Aztec Club of 1847 (Mexican War) meets in conjunction with OIWUS. As stated in the OIWUS roster, “The purpose of OIWUS is to perpetuate the history of the services rendered by the American military forces during conflicts and wars within the territory of the United States....The Order continues to preserve the memory of those soldiers, pioneers and settlers who...with unyielding bravery and uncommon sacrifice, helped to tame the New World and build the America that we cherish beyond all description.” Occurring at the end of Hereditary Fortnight, the OIWUS banquet is held at Belle Haven Country Club in nearby Virginia. The elegant white-tie banquet evokes the 19th century, and



features gourmet wild cuisine such as bison, elk, and moose, tempered by juniper berry sorbet as an amuse-bouche, with a typical repast ending in English trifle, port, and hand-rolled cigars. Toasts, conviviality, and hearty singing of patriotic songs create an evening without compare. Membership in OIWUS is for gentlemen only, with ladies attending the banquet as their guests.

Each spring, Hereditary Fortnight in Washington allows like-minded people to share their collective heritage, lineage, and heredity. The proximity of location in America’s capital allows convenient interaction among the various societies,

Above: (l-r) Bill Carrell, Governor of the Society of Colonial Wars in the Commonwealth of Kentucky; Philip Livingston, Registrar General of The National Society Americans of Royal Descent; Nicholas Donnell Ward, former President of the National Gavel Society; and Karen Cardullo, Governor General of The Hereditary Order of Descendants of Colonial Governors.
Below: Michael and Carol Lynch, 1st Vice President General of The Colonial Dames of America.

most of whose members travel great distances to Washington. Nearly three-quarters of a century of Hereditary Fortnight in Washington has allowed the hereditary community to thrive, gain membership, and not become irrelevant in the 21st century. 

About the Author

Brantley C.B. Knowles (Mrs. Peter I.C. Knowles II) is President General of the National Society of Americans of Royal Descent (NSARD); President of the Society of American Friends of Lincoln Cathedral; and First Vice President General of The Colonial Dames of America (CDA). A frequent lecturer and writer on the topics of historic preservation and both English and American history, Mrs. Knowles completed the Royal Collection Studies of the Attingham Trust, which took place in the various royal residences of HM the Queen in 2017.