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Thanks again,

Sharon Hall
Editor, Publisher, Researcher, Writer and Graphic Designer
Digging History Magazine

And now, for a mystery of a different sort – a family history mystery . . .

Searching for that EUREKA! Moment: Who Where You, Roy Simpleman?

by Sharon Hall

I am the newsletter editor for my local genealogical society's newsletter and occasionally write a column entitled "Adventures in Research: Sometimes You Just Have to Keep Digging". In the story related below, I played a minuscule role, but it's such a fascinating story I think you will find it interesting and informative. Immediately following this story one of the main characters plays a role in the next, in what turned out to be one of the most volatile feuds in Texas history.

As an editor, this "adventure" ironically began with a misspelled name.

Who Were You Roy Simpleman?

On July 5, 2015 I received an email from a reader at my Digging History blog on one of the very first articles I wrote in October of 2013. After learning about the Dawson, New Mexico coal mine disaster one hundred years previous, I decided to write a Tombstone Tuesday article entitled "The Immigrant Miners of Dawson, New Mexico".

I usually wrote those articles focusing on a single person, or perhaps a husband and wife. Instead, for that article I wrote about the tragic deaths of immigrant miners, some who had literally just gotten off the boat days earlier. Over two hundred and fifty men perished that day.

One of the survivors was a miner whose name was reported by newspapers as Roy Simpion. As it turns out, that was either a misprint or misspelling of his name. The email I received in July was from Roy's great grandson Doug Simpleman.

Doug wrote me a bit more about his great grandfather, adding that Roy later worked as a mine rescuer before being paralyzed and passing away a few years later. Doug also shared how proud he was of his family's mining history which he believes stretches back to the days of Spanish Hidalgos sent to Mexico by King Charles of Spain.

Doug had noted that I provide ancestry research services and wondered if I could help with the translation of some Mexican records. At that time he felt a dead end had been reached in his own research.

I informed him I had access to Mexican records at Ancestry.com, however my Spanish was rusty. I also told him about a member of the genealogy society I belonged to who was an experienced LDS researcher (Roger Ward) who might be able to assist him. I promised to contact him and also to follow up with some research for marriage records at the Albuquerque Genealogy Library when I visited at the end of August.

Doug related how Roy Simpleman wasn't his great grandfather's real name. He had located a church baptismal record but no father's name was listed. Roy's birth name was actually Refugio Badial and his mother's name, Ramona Badial, alone, was listed which meant he was illegitimate.

He also found the name of Ramona's parents: Eucebio and Cevera (Nilo) Badial, and Eucebio's father was named Benito. Those were all the records he had found, yet family "lore" had been circulating for years indicating the family's history could possibly be traced to an Italian priest with the Badiali surname who immigrated to Spain and later he and/or his descendants immigrated to Mexico.

Doug was also aware that Benito had worked in the silver mines around Guanajuato, Mexico in the early 1800s. His goal was to prove whether the family's history could indeed be traced back to an Italian priest and to also discover who fathered Refugio (Roy).

In a series of emails I began asking questions about his research and what theories he had regarding his great grandfather. His research indicated a name change for the 1910 census when Roy Simpleman was enumerated in Koehler, New Mexico.



Roy had married a girl named Emily Rounsley whose mother may have been French or Northern Italian. Doug suspected prejudice against an Italo-Latin name may have been the rationale although he had yet to prove his theory. He thought perhaps Refugio had gotten into some kind of trouble around the age of sixteen and a name change was a way to escape his past.

Doug always believed Roy was born in November of 1893 because he was baptized in December 1893, although Roy would later record July 4 of that year

as his date of birth (and claimed to be a US natural-born citizen). Also, he had been born in Guanajuato and baptized in Chihuahua — "a heck of a distance!", Doug exclaimed!

This sequence of events also occurred around the time of the overthrow of Porfirio Diaz's government. Perhaps it was related to political instability and turmoil within the region?

A few days later Roger sent a message after he found some additional information, confirming Doug's suspicion that Refugio had been born illegitimately. Since he was listed as "naturale" without a father's name — versus one like "hijo legitimo" or "h.l." — if a church wedding hadn't occurred the child was indeed illegitimate in the eyes of the church regardless of whether the parents intended to marry.

Several weeks went by and after a futile search in Albuquerque I emailed Doug to say I hadn't found Roy's marriage records which I had hoped to find. On September 19 I received an email at 7:02 a.m. from Doug thanking me for my (and Roger's) help.

Seven minutes later at 7:09 a.m. I received a newly created email from Doug with a subject line:

BREAKTHROUGH!

Doug had just Googled "San Pedro Corralitos", the name of a Mexican mine. He provided a link to a Facebook page, an article in Spanish which mentioned the mining representative's name: George Zempelman. Could this have been Refugio's father?!?

I replied to Doug's email, ecstatic that he had uncovered what might well be a vital piece of his family history puzzle. I also wanted to know more about the New York capitalist who employed George Zempelman.

After scanning through some newspaper articles and various other references, I noted stories about political unrest and clashes with mining corporations and land companies. This well might have been reason for Refugio's parentage to have been kept secret. Locals likely were disdainful of corporate tactics and it makes sense Ramona wouldn't have wanted to give her son the name of someone who worked for them.

In the next email I sent back to Doug (this was all taking place on September 19) I put forth a theory for him to consider. I had discovered there were Mormons in that area of Mexico — might the company have contracted the services of a local, say perhaps a Mormon by the name of Zempelman?

Meanwhile, I continued to research and found an entry at Find-A-Grave for George Bernhard Zempelman. Born in Bavaria, Germany, George was a lieutenant in the 8th Texas Calvary Regiment during the Civil War. At one time he was briefly sheriff of Travis County and a land speculator, owner of land that would eventually become the LBJ Ranch.

He started Zempelman & Bergen, a land title company which later became known as the Gracy Title Company. One of his sons was George Walter Kyle Zempelman ("George Kyle") and it seemed more logical that Refugio's father could have been the younger George.

It appears I wasn't so far off about my Mormon theory. George Kyle Zempelman died in 1906 in Salt Lake City at the age of thirty-five. George Kyle's daughter Waldine was a member of LDS and also died in Salt Lake City years later.



Young George Walter Kyle Zempelman

George Kyle's first child wasn't born until 1900 after his marriage to Jane Reece in 1898. Refugio had been born in 1893 — see how the puzzle pieces seemed to be connecting?

Doug contacted me again in mid-October with an update. He had been told an interesting story by one of his uncles and the uncle believed Doug's theories were spot-on. The uncle said that Doug's grandfather had told him many years ago that Roy's father was a mining engineer who was just passing through the area.

Doug then discovered that indeed George Kyle Zempelman was a mining engineer, a graduate of Texas A&M, who later moved to Salt Lake City and married a Mormon girl. EUREKA!!

I have to say that day in September was one of the most exhilarating research forays I'd had in awhile. We were emailing back and forth furiously for about four hours.

Toward the end of our hours-long exchange, I asked Doug if any of the pictures he'd found revealed any family resemblance. He laughed and said "no" because he was mostly Italian — he looked like a "Jersey boy."



Young Roy

Doug Simpleman is proud of his heritage, as well he should be. His grandfather Lee Roy Simpleman (Roy's son) raised six children who went on to serve their communities in successful public, private and military careers. Among Lee Roy's grandchildren and Roy's great grandchildren are engineers, biochemists, toxicologists and teachers.

Lee Roy had been raised by his grandmother Ramona for the first five years of his life (reasons unknown), so she has always held a special place in the family's history. On September 19, 2015 Doug Simpleman believed he had finally uncovered the real story.

Still, Doug wanted definitive proof of his lineage and had plans to submit to a Y-DNA test, one that tests the paternal line. Y-DNA passes directly from father to son to grandson and so on without change. Doug attempted to contact possible relatives to participate in the test and found at least one man in Alaska who was considering it. That was November of 2015.

Regardless of whether he found others to participate, Doug was determined to take the Y-DNA test. A few months went by and on March 17, 2016 I received an email from him informing me of the test results which had taken three months to process. That day was also Doug's forty-fourth birthday.

For Doug the story had gotten "cooler" as the test results revealed without a doubt he was the great-great grandson of George Walter Kyle Zimpelman, Roy's birth father.

This also meant he was the great-great-great grandson of George Bernhard Zimpelman, an early Texas settler.

I conducted more research on George Zimpelman and found numerous references to him in newspapers, much of it at the Portal to Texas History web site. George, the son of Johan Jacob Zempelmann of Bavaria, was born on July 24, 1832 (birth record states July 26, 1832). His mother, Maria Salome Hochdoeffler, was a granddaughter of a general under the Emperor.¹

Exactly when George immigrated to the United States is a bit unclear as I found conflicting information. One source indicates he arrived in 1846 with his uncle and aunt. They settled for a time in New Orleans where George worked as a dry goods clerk. In 1847 they relocated to Austin, the capital of what was by then the twenty-eighth state of the United States. Power had been transferred from the Republic of Texas to the State of Texas on February 19, 1846.

This source claimed George's family had unfortunately died shortly after arriving in Austin after being exposed to disease in Galveston, leaving him on his own at the age of fifteen. By 1854 he had mastered the skills of carpentry before abruptly changing to gunsmithing. In 1856 he began farming and raising stock around Austin until the Civil War.²

Yet another source claimed George arrived in the Republic of Texas in 1845, having read published reports in Germany, he struck out on his own:

Much had been published in Germany about the new republic of Texas, and young George Zimpelman, having caught its spirit, decided to make his way thither, and he came to Texas in 1845, locating on the Colorado River, where he purchased a plantation. In

1856 he located on a plantation near Austin, where he pursued stock-raising and agriculture until the breaking out of the Civil War.³

This source seems a bit far-fetched as it seems to imply an adolescent George Zimpelman purchased a plantation on the Colorado River in 1845! Perhaps it was only poorly worded, the account provided by a Terry's Texas Rangers historian in a 1911 issue of *Confederate Veteran* magazine.

Nevertheless, it has been noted through multiple sources that George Bernhard Zimpelman enlisted in Company D of Terry's Texas Rangers (8th Texas Cavalry) in July of 1861. He was sworn into Confederate service on September 5, 1861, serving from October 1861 until May 1865. Despite being only a private he was well-known as a brave fighter and often selected as a leader. In one battle he was wounded twice, and although maimed for life chose to remain until the end of the war.

Upon his return to Texas George Zimpelman served as Sheriff of Travis County, a dangerous and difficult job during the Reconstruction era. He had land dealings all over the state and even made a little Texas history with his involvement in the so-called El Paso Salt War (see the next article).

A little side note — I was flabbergasted to discover I had written the story about the Salt War one month after writing the story about the Dawson mine explosion (see this month's "Dash" column) which started this whole saga with Doug. I had no idea the two stories would be linked with George Zimpelman!



FEUDING & FIGHTING: THE EL PASO SALT WAR

San Elizario in El Paso County, Texas was the location of this conflict over mineral rights. San Elizario was founded in 1789 south of the Rio Grande River. In 1831 a flood changed the course of the river and San Elizario became an "island"

("La Isla") between two channels of the river. In 1836 the Republic of Texas set its southern boundary at the Rio Grande, so for a time the nationality of San Elizario residents was in question. With the Treaty of Hidalgo, the border was officially set at the southern channel, so San Elizario, already a thriving town (the largest between San Antonio and Santa Fe) was now officially Texan.

Reconstruction brought changes to that part of Texas with Republicans settling in the area after the Civil War. Yet, Democrats soon began to assert their political muscle to regain power. The Southern Democrats did not mix well with the Hispanics and their culture so rivalries arose.

For years the residents of San Elizario had collected salt from the Guadalupe Mountains. The salt, of course, served many purposes — preserving meat, seasoning and an essential component for the extraction of silver from area mines. In 1863, the town had built a road out to the salt flats, and other residents of the Rio Grande Valley had been granted access as well. However, in 1866 the state of Texas was ready to allow individuals outside the area to stake claims. Now the access rights that had been part of the Treaty of Hidalgo were overturned.

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THE MAGAZINE



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Emigration Societies**

Mining and Murder
The Immigrant Miners
of Dawson, New Mexico

Feuding and Fighting:
The El Paso Salt War

Galveston: The Ellis
Island of Texas

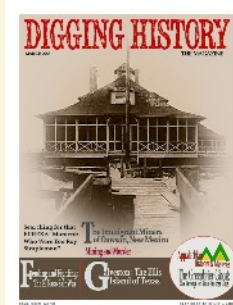


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Galveston Quarantine #2, ca. 1917

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