

Guest Article

!IT'S OUR 13TH ANNIVERSARY

By Lodwick H. Alford

Lodwick H. Alford, known as Wick to all his friends, was born and raised in Sylvester, Worth Co., GA. He attended the U. S. Naval Academy at Annapolis and served 35 years in the Navy before retiring in 1967. During that time he served in battleships, cruisers, destroyers, aircraft carriers and auxiliary craft. Early in career specialized in gunnery and later in personnel management. In senior ranks commanded a destroyer in the Korean War, a division of four destroyers in the Atlantic Fleet, a squadron of eight destroyers in the Sixth (Mediterranean) Fleet and an 18,000 ton repair ship. Was with the Asiatic Fleet early in the war and awarded the Bronze Star Medal three times and a Commendation Medal, all for service in combat. He is one of the co-founders of the association and one of the more active members. H was the first president serving for five years. He was also the first chairman of the board of directors. Most recently he has been chair of the human resources committee and responsible for member recognition. He is one of the several who have been inducted into the AAFA Alford Hall of Fame. . - Editors



CELEBRATION AND REFLECTION!

It has been thirteen years since a small group of us-Alfords or descendants formally organized the Alford American Family Association in 1987. We have come a long way from a few members at the outset to more than 1100 now. We have every reason to be immensely proud of the direction the association has taken as well as the growth in membership.

Organized as non-profit and incorporated in Missouri, the state of residence of our first executive director, Gilbert K. Alford, Jr. the association with yours truly as the first elected president, started out with a simple purpose. That purpose was for mutual self-help in tracing our ancestors in that

never ending quest to find out who we are and from whence we came. While that simple purpose is sometimes broken down into facets for practical reasons of research, education and fellowship, the overall direction of the association has been remarkably true to the original ideas.

These ideas have been to do as much genealogy research as we can on our forbears, to share information with members and non-members alike at no charge. We ask only that those seeking our help reciprocate with information about their ancestors. There are no paid officers, directors or members all is volunteer work. Minor expenses of research, copies, postage, etc are borne by members. Only heavy expenses of administration are paid from the treasury. It is my firm conviction that devotion to these simple ideas together

with the growth of our quarterly AAFA ACTION publication from a few pages to 100 plus now, have been the primary factors in the success of our Alford American Family Association.

Of almost equal importance has been the advent of computers and development of software capable of handling, processing, storing and printout of great masses of genealogical data. In addition easy and rapid communications within the association have been facilitated by increased use of Internet e-mail. More recently adoption of a web site by the association has been manifested by marked increase in new members. These advantages are by no means offset by the downside of computer genealogy, namely, the tendency of newcomers sometimes erroneously to rely on computers in searching for their

ancestors rather than primary sources.

But while we celebrate the 13th anniversary of our formal organization, in a larger sense it is well to reflect that this might really be our 30th year of mutual cooperation in searching for our forbears. Upon my retirement from the Navy in the late 1960's I commenced frequent genealogy trips to North Carolina from my home in Chevy Chase, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, DC. These trips were in part stimulated by a superb Alford Family Bulletin distributed by a grand lady Mrs. Lewis O. "Tressie" Bowman who lived in nearby Gaithersburg, Maryland just a few miles from my home. I remember well when I visited this great lady in the early 1970's and if I had not already been committed to researching my line of Alford's, she would have inspired me to do so. When the Alford Hall of Fame was set-up in 1990 she was most appropriately the first to be inducted.

Sometime in the 1980's Mr. Gilbert K. Alford, Jr. of Florissant, Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis, became aware of the Alford Bulletin put out by Mrs. Bowman and commenced research on his line of Alford's. He had already done some research on the family of his spouse Mary Newkirk Alford. Later when Mrs. Bowman was no longer able to distribute her bulletin, Gil took over that task. Then I moved with my family back to my native Georgia in late 1973 and in the mid-1970's fell heir to the walking stick of my great, great grandfather James Lodwick Alford. The walking cane, fashioned in 1770, intrigued me and I knew I was a goner-addicted to tracing my Alford ancestors. But it was soon apparent that this was a daunting task. It was difficult to know what questions to ask and where to look for answers-libraries, courthouses, archives, in addition to some of our oldest relatives.

Later I learned that Gil had also reached somewhat the same conclusion that we needed some leverage, that we could not go it alone. We needed many genealogy researchers to proceed on a broad front. This soon led to thoughts of some kind of organization although I had never met Gil and did not know he existed. I will never forget the first letter I got from Gil about 1982. I was on my sailboat at Key West, Florida and his letter just about lifted me out of my helmsman seat. It was immediately apparent we had been thinking along the same lines. We soon collaborated on publishing a book in 1987 on my line of Alford's where I more or less furnished the raw data and Gil processed the material in his new-fangled computer. The pages and ancestry charts printed out were just about perfect and the book was an immediate success, very quickly selling out.

I knew the book was a hit when some of my relatives told me they could not put it down until finished and others said they had stayed up all night reading it. The major credit is due to Gil and the computer age for publishing the book. I could not have accomplished the same in less than ten years. Copies of the book are in the Library of Congress, the LDS Salt Lake City, the Archives in Raleigh, Atlanta and several libraries.

Then the same year the book was published in 1987, AAFA was organized and the rest, as they say, is history. At the first meeting of the association in October, 1988 in Atlanta I was very apprehensive. There were only fourteen of us but when I saw the caliber, competence and dedication of the attendees my fears vanished. I will also never forget the euphoria I felt as I drove home to South Georgia and realized our association would fly.

By the fifth annual meeting in 1992 in Destin, Florida it was apparent

to all that Gil was the driving force behind AAFA and by the direction of the Board of Directors, Gilbert K. Alford, Jr was proclaimed the Alford Man of the Decade, 1982-1992. By the same token, the 1999 retirement (temporary we hope) of Ms. Pamela Alford Thompson, the editor of the quarterly AAFA ACTION which has become known as the finest of its kind in the nation, Ms. Pamela Thompson was proclaimed in San Antonio, Texas as the Alford Woman of the Decade, 1989-1999.

Now the questions arise-where do we go from here? What does the future hold? My first reactions are that the association has been doing very well and it is hard to argue against success. That is sort of a way of saying "if it ain't broke don't fix it." While Gil and I have never agreed on a "tight versus loose" organization for AAFA, I think it is safe to say that his counsel has been the wiser. But questions keep arising-What do we do when membership reaches 5000? How about 10,000? Do we hire a paid professional staff? Do we acquire some real property for storage and housing of Alford genealogy files and memorabilia?

And we always have somebody who wants to reorganize the universe. I say lets just keep on keeping on and cross those bridges when we get to them. We have always been able to adjust to changing situations and when problems arise they nearly always suggest solutions. We will look forward to seeing you in Augusta, Georgia next year. Y'all come, you hear! LHA

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