

## Our History, Part IX

*Submitted by Gil Alford, AAFA #0019, Member AAFA Hall of Fame  
(Co-founder & Past President)*

I was talking to one of you on the phone the other day and was reminded that I had not done a segment on "our history" for sometime. Needless to say that I was surprised when I checked up on it and found that part VIII was in issue #74. Fall 2006. As I began to get reorganized to resume this chronology I soon discovered why there may have been something of a delay. The next subject due up was Mrs. Lewis O. "Tressie" Bowman. The more recent folks will not recognize her, but the "old timers" will. We could do a book on her. A brief biography was published in *AAFA ACTION*, #10, September 1990. That is now available on the AAFA website at [www.alfordassociation.org/ACTION/aact1048.pdf](http://www.alfordassociation.org/ACTION/aact1048.pdf). We finally got her In Remembrance published in the previous issue. We have also begun to post copies of her ALFORD FAMILY BULLETIN (see more below) on the website where they may be found at [www.alfordassociation.org/OTHER\\_PUB/tressie\\_bowman.html](http://www.alfordassociation.org/OTHER_PUB/tressie_bowman.html).

Before going on with that let me tell you my plans. Part V listed all of the subjects who had been covered in the first five segments. In the next segment, Part X I'll do the same to bring the list up to date which will probably take us to March 1983. Remember this all began in August 1982. We now have a page fixed on the website called "Our History" and have posted all the segments at [www.alfordassociation.org/HISTORY/aafahist.html](http://www.alfordassociation.org/HISTORY/aafahist.html).

1983 is five years before the Alford association was created, but what happened in that period 1982-1987 laid the foundation for the association. Many of the AAFA members joined the Alford effort in those days, and some continue active until this day. However, many of those who did not live to see AAFA created, or who did not join when it was, played a critical role in making it come to pass.

In the very first paragraph of Part I, I mentioned Tressie Bowman. Later in that issue as I provided you with a copy of the first letter I received from my first "associate," Mrs. Lewis O. Bowman was mentioned. She was mentioned on the next page in the letter I received from my second "associate." That continued with so many folks responding to my initial letter telling me about Tressie Bowman.

Some of them began to send copies of one or more of Tressie's *Alford Family Bulletin*. She did this publication from July 1970 through Fall 1979 doing 12 issues over that period. She was the focal point - the heart and soul - of Alford family research and history during that time. As indicated above, we will be putting parts, or all, of the Alford Family Bulletins on the website as we proceed. The subscription cost for 1970 was \$1 and for 1971 \$2. When it came to a close in 1979 the cost was \$7.

Actually, I first heard of Mrs. Lewis O. Bowman via an advertisement in a 1982 issue of *The Genealogical Helper*. I wrote her a letter July 16, 1982, to learn more about her publication and to see if we could arrange some kind of information exchange. I sent a follow-up on August 24, 1982, and on August 30 she responded with the following:

"Thank you for your interest in the ALFORD FAMILY BULLETIN.

"Due to circumstances beyond my control, one being my age (83) [I can relate to that.]. I ceased publishing the

Bulletin with issue number 12, Fall 1979.

“Unfortunately Genealogical Helper continues listing it.

“I may be able to help from my given name (ALFORD) file, if you will send me your given name interest, with location and date.

“Your check received is herewith returned.

“Scattered issues are available at \$4.50 per issue.

“P.S. I have recently had past issues reprinted and now can send a complete file for the entire 12 issues of \$40.00.

“Sincerely,”

I don't plan to include many of my letters in this history but I think this one to Mrs. Bowman, who I had already begun to see as my predecessor, is pertinent to our history. The following was written and sent, September 7, 1982, to:

“Dear Mrs. Bowman,

“Thank you for responding to my letter and returning my check. I regret that you have found it necessary to discontinue your ALFORD FAMILY BULLETIN. Congratulations on having reached your 83<sup>rd</sup> year. I suspect I'll stop any disciplined activity way before I reach that age.

“I appreciate your offer to help if I would send you my given name interest along with location and date. I am from the same Alford line as your daughter. (I have often wondered why you say “your daughters ancestor” rather than yours. I have concluded that she is a daughter by a previous marriage) My great grandfather was John Seaborn Alford, one of the twin sons of Jacob Alford and Frankie Seaborn. My personal genealogical concern is clearing up my ancestry, starting with Jacob and going on back. I'll mention another genealogical concern later in the letter. [As it turned out I was right about the daughter from a previous marriage, but Tressie did have Alford ancestry of her own, She descends from Joanna Alford, a sister of Benedict Alford and Alexander Alvord. The three immigrated to Boston, MA in the early 1630s.]

“As you will know there are several conflicting reports about Jacob, his wives, his children, and his parents. I have compared the family charts described by you in a couple of your bulletins, the family as described by Hugh Edwin Alford in his ALFORD GENEALOGICAL HISTORY (I had a copy of his manuscript before I saw it published in two of your bulletins) and I have a genealogy that was compiled for Mrs. Duncan Murphy (nee Pearl Alford), granddaughter of John Seaborn Alford. Her compilation was apparently prepared for acceptance into The Colonial Dames of the XVIII Century. It was subsequently published by Southern Historical Press as part of *Source Records from Pike County Mississippi 1798-1910*. Without even getting into Jacobs parentage one can find significant controversy in the children of Jacob and Frankie Seaborn, and in some cases Jacob and Elizabeth Bryant. Your charts for example list two possibly three (if you count Warren) children the other two do not mention. Hugh Edwin mentions one that you and Mrs. Murphy do not mention etc. I know that one of your objectives was to search for confirming information on just what did constitute your daughters ancestral line. [What I called “Alford Genealogy History” here was actually “In Search of My Alford Ancestors” and was published in the quarterly and is now available on our AAFA website. The Pike County Mississippi publication was done by Prof. E. Russ Williams who is now a member of AAFA. The late Paul C. Murphy, son of Pearl Alford Murphy, is AAFA #0255 and he and his wife were present at the second AAFA meeting which was in Houston in 1989.]

"We have a similar objective, and even before we had heard of the Alford Family Bulletin, we had decided on an approach similar to yours, yet different. We retired early last year and bought a personal computer several months later. Early this year we became interested in our ancestry. We thought if we collected all the information we could and put it into our computer, it would help us to solve some of our genealogical mysteries. As we began to do this we started receiving copies of your bulletin from one correspondent or another until we now have a complete file. As our correspondents expanded, primarily from *The Genealogical Helper* and their "ROOTS" file we have detected a need for some kind of exchange for Alford Genealogical Information.

"I have just begun loading Alford data into our computer. We use it to answer queries and provide any genealogical service we can free of charge to those with whom we correspond. We plan to start publishing information about Alford Genealogy in something we will call "About Alford." It will be a small free sort of newsletter. It will not be like yours and contain census, soundex, marriage records, death records, etc. It will be more correspondence and questions from our "subscribers." It will concentrate on genealogical investigation and analysis more than the reporting of data. Should we find out that someone else is performing a similar service, then of course, we will revise our plans. Please tell us if anyone is trying to continue your program or if you know of anyone else providing any kind of centralized Alford Genealogical Service.

"If you have any friends or previous subscribers who are sincerely interested in Alford Genealogy, please feel free to refer them to us. We make no promises to any of those with whom we are in contact, but then by the same token, we ask nothing from them other than their Alford information.

"I am adding you to our mailing list and you will receive a copy of "About Alford" when it is occasionally published. From time to time, we may ask you a question about something in one of your bulletins. We also will be glad to include in our publication, any message you may have for our readers.

"We covet any comments or suggestions you may have from your many years of publishing *The Alford Family Bulletin*. Thank you again for your letter.

"Sincerely,

Gilbert K. Alford, Jr."

I did not hear anymore from her for a couple of months and then received the following letter on December 8, 1982. I'm dispensing with the addresses and salutation.

Not realizing who she was or the connection between the two I also sent one of our "introductory" letters to Lucy Shull Stevens who was her daughter.

Here is the content of the next letter we had from Tressie E. Bowman, written from November 26, 1982, to December 4, 1982, and received on December 8.

"Dear Mr. Alford:

"I hope you will forgive my delay in getting this material to you. As you can see I started this letter on the 26th November but got no further than that.

"You wrote my daughter Mrs. Robert J. Stevens, sending her a form to fill out. Since she is my only daughter (who has and is still very ill from radiation treatment after Cancer surgery) she has asked me to inform you why she has not replied. [This daughter, Lucy Shull Stevens, will enter our history later.]

"I am enclosing the charts which are mostly self-explanatory as you will see, should you desire others as time permits due to the Christmas holidays, I will be happy to send you.

"I received your first issue of *About Alford's* and found it very interesting. Hope you do not get discouraged by such as I, seem to be lax in replying. Enclosed is some of my peeslips (Library term) relating to several Jacob, John and Julius Alford's. [She was later to donate this entire file, about 7,000 slips to the Alford effort. I think we eventually got it all keyed into our basic Alford database. The originals are now part of our AAFA data system.]

"Also I have enclosed a partial (small list) of the latest who have written enquiring about the Alford Bulletin. I have much more that corresponded for several years. [I wrote to all whose addresses she shared with us.]

"Do you have a photocopy of Volume 2 of *Kinfolks* prepared and published by William Curry Harlee 1935. Someone sent me a copy from the Los Angeles Library call number 929.2H-. It is mostly about the descendants of Jacob Alford who married Mary Pace altho it carried names of other Alford groups, pages 1326 thru 1473. [I don't remember if we had that data at this time or not, but I soon found it available in the National Genealogical Society Library and borrowed it via their book loan by mail program. I photocopied all of the pertinent "Alford" pages. The entire work is now digitized at Heritage Quest and Ancestry.com.]

"Lucy (my daughter) is recovering very well, however she gets back sets if she overloads her stomach the area must be damaged by the radiation. She entered the NIH Hospital September 11 for emergency surgery that evening because of a ruptured ulcer in the duodenal area and was just able to go home Thanksgiving day for the day for the first time having been in intensive care for most of the period. She is now going home for the day only three times a week. We hope it will soon be permanent. [Lucy never got over the cancer but she did get better and served for a time as the AAFA DAR representative. She managed to make it to the 1990 AAFA meeting in Raleigh before she finally succumbed to the cancer.]

"I wish you and yours a healthy, happy Christmas time. Let me hear what you think of any portion I am sending."

End of Tressie's letter.

As this is being written, the first two issues of her *Alford Family Bulletin* are on the website. More will likely be there by the time you are reading this. Look for photographs and more of her letters there also. You can check them out at the address below or navigate on our website HOME→PUBLICATIONS→WORK PUBLISHED BY OTHERS→Alford Family Bulletin.

[http://www.alfordassociation.org/OTHER\\_PUB/tressie\\_bowman.html](http://www.alfordassociation.org/OTHER_PUB/tressie_bowman.html)