Then there are the unexpected things that happen...

… like a box of family history from a cousin that was completely unexpected. Perhaps it is like an unexpected DNA match.

Craig Swan
November 2025

In June of 2025 I received a box of family memorabilia from my second cousin, once removed, Katie. Katie's great grandfather, Scott Acker MacEachron, married one of my grandfather's sisters, Estelle Swan. I know a lot about Estelle and Scott, their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, including Katie, but I knew hardly anything about Scott's MacEachron family

With a little work on Ancestry and the web to augment the material from Katie, there turned out to be any number of interesting stories, some of them quite sad.

Scott's father, Katie's Great Great Grandfather, Acker MacEachron, ran for governor of Iowa on the Prohibition Party ticket at the turn of the 20th century. He got about 4% of the vote, one of the better showings for Prohibition party candidates.

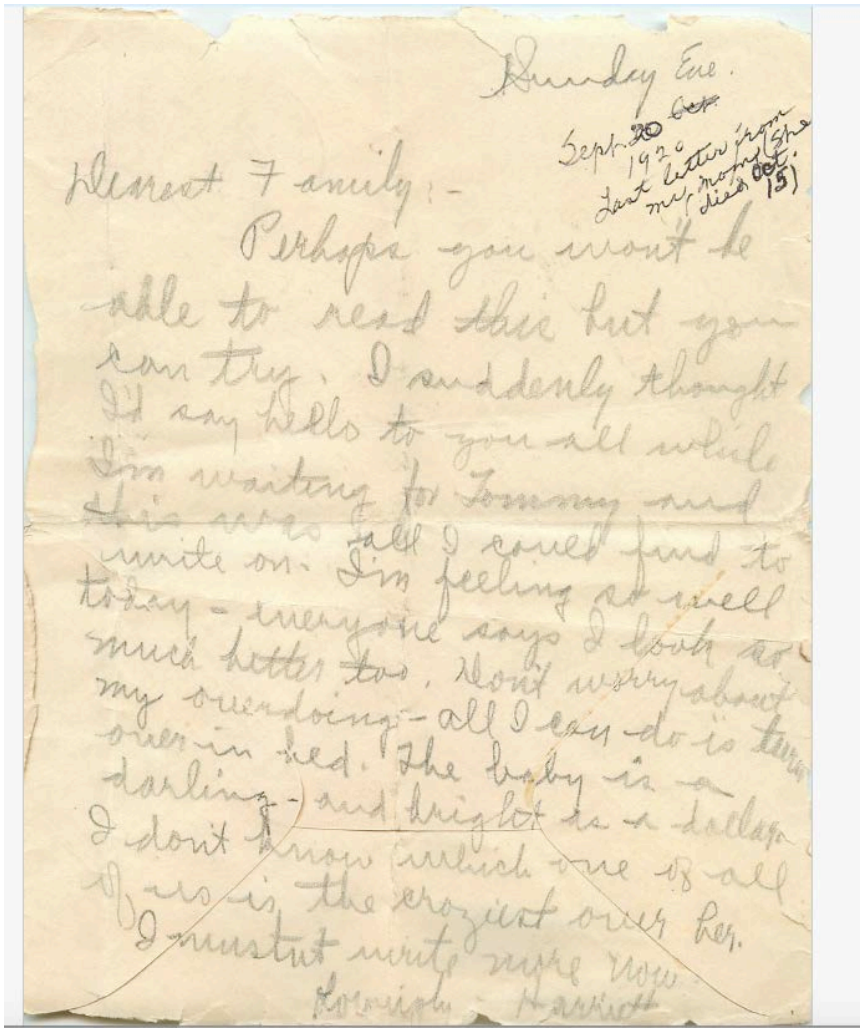
Acker and his wife Finette had four children, Scott MacEachron and his three siblings, two of who died relatively young.

Harriett MacEachron Thompson
1893-1920

A daughter, Harriett, volunteered with the YMCA to go to Europe to work with American troops after WW I. She fell in love with a dashing young officer, William Thompson, who was recognized for bravery and valor, being awarded both the Silver Star and the Distinguished Service Cross. During the action that led to the Distinguished Silver Cross Thompson was seriously injured.

When Harriet and William returned to the US they married. The packet from Katie included 25 letters from Harriett to her parents, Acker and Finette, while she was pregnant with her first child. But Harriett died less than five weeks after her daughter was born at the age of 26. The last of the 25 letters, was written at Christmas time, two months after her death, from her husband William to Harriett's parents.

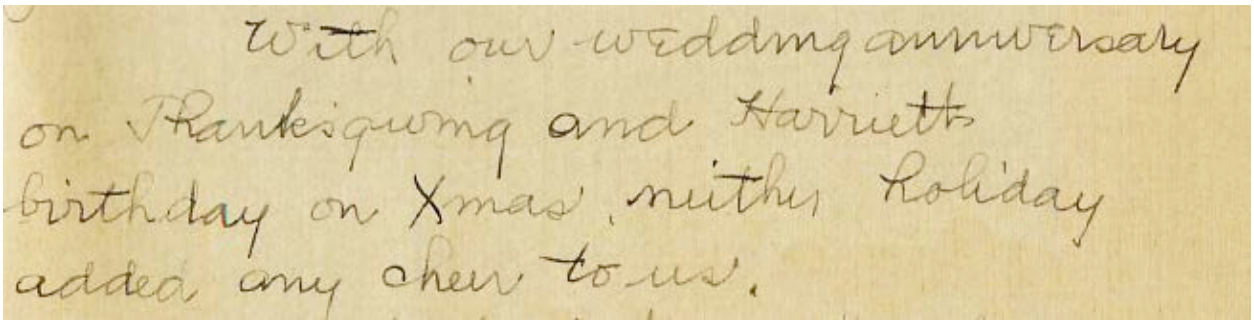
Comment on the upper left corner of the envelope and the comment on the upper right corner of the letter are by Harriett's daughter who lived to be 84 years old.



Sunday Eve
Sept 20, 1920 Last letter from my Mommy. She died on October 15

Dear Family
Perhaps you won't be able to read this but you can try. I suddenly thought I'd say hello to all while I'm waiting for Tommy and this was all I could find to write on. I'm feeling so well today. Everyone says I look so much better too. Don't worry about my overdoing - all I can do is to turnover in bed. The baby is a darling - and bright as a dollar. I don't know which one of all of us is the craziest over her. I mustn't write more now
Lovingly, Harriett

Letter from William Thompson to Harriett's parents, December 29, 1920


With our wedding anniversary
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Harriett had a brother, Paul MacEachron, who after graduating from Grinnell and with his wife Helen, spent five years in China on a program called Grinnell in China. When they returned to the United States, they returned to Iowa, where Paul worked as Dean of Men and football coach at Grinnell College. They then moved to Oberlin when Paul was hired as football coach and served also as basketball coach for a few years. Five years later he died of a heart attack at age 40 while on a family picnic.

Paul Norton MacEachron
1889 - 1930

Paul and Helen had four children, including a son, also named Paul. The younger Paul was a student at Oberlin and went to Spain to fight Franco as part of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion. He was killed in Spain by Franco's fascist forces in 1938 when he was 22.

Paul Norton MacEachron Jr.
1916 - 1938

From

COMRADES: Tales of a Brigadista in the Spanish Civil War, Harry Fisher, University of Nebraska Press, 1998

3. I learned later that Corrigan was killed when his company was ordered to retreat quickly because the fascists were closing in on them. He and a friend of his, Paul MacEachron, a student from Oberlin College in Ohio, volunteered to hold the fascists back while the rest of the company got a good start. They were never seen again.

Lendrum “Len” MacEachron was also a son of Paul and Helen MacEachron. After a 25 year career as a patent attorney Len and his wife Suanna moved to Minneapolis, where he worked as a luthier and became a major figure in the folk music scene here in the Twin Cities. Len was active in many peace, justice and environmental organizations and an avid square and contra dancer. I am only sorry that I did not know him while he was alive.

From the *Star-Tribune*, September 15, 2010

Lendrum MacEachron, 91, lover of folk music

He quit the law in 1968 to open a Minneapolis shop where he sold dulcimers and other instruments he made in the Cedar Riverside area.

By JIM ADAMS
Star Tribune

September 15, 2010

You can get a sense of Len MacEachron's impact on Minnesota folk music by some of the musicians who attended a service for him last week in St. Paul. Among them were Ross Sutter, Paddy O'Brien, Laura MacKenzie and Peter Ostroushko. "Prairie Home Companion" icon Garrison Keillor sent a poignant tribute.

After 25 years as a patent attorney, MacEachron quit in 1968 to focus full time on his passion: folk music and making dulcimers, harps and other instruments in a shop he and his wife opened in Minneapolis.

"Len and [wife] Su were almost like parent figures to a lot of us," said Sutter, who worked at the shop and learned to play the dulcimer there. "They helped a lot of young musicians by getting people together and networking in the '70s. ... He really loved good music.”

MacEachron, 91, died in his sleep Aug. 30 in Minneapolis. He had Alzheimer's disease.

Guitarist Adam Granger, also was at the service and recalled MacEachron's legendary jams and parties. Granger, of Keillor's Powdermilk Biscuit Band, said he often saw MacEachron at square and contra dance events. The latter often were held at the Tapestry Folkdance Center in south Minneapolis, which MacEachron, at about 80, helped remodel and which has a lounge named for him.

"He was a true folkie," Granger said. "He and Su were doing this folk outreach back in the '60s. He was very instrumental 40 or 50 years ago in laying the early foundation for the folk scene in the Cities."

Granger read a eulogy in which Keillor recalled "Len's big grin and his resilient humor and his great love of music and musicians."

MacEachron and his wife played dulcimers years ago on the "Prairie Home Companion" radio show, Keillor said by phone Tuesday. He "was an active, enthusiastic supporter of

folk music in all its forms," Keillor said. He recalled many jam sessions at the couple's old farmhouse in New Brighton. The sessions "were the kind of party where 15 are invited and 60 show up," Keillor said. "They were in the middle of it, wonderful hosts.

"They were a remarkable phenomenon to people in the acoustic music tribe who were mostly in their 20s and 30s," Keillor continued. "Here was a couple a generation older; his and Su's importance was one of encouragement for younger people, who tend be very competitive, very self-critical and easily discouraged because the [folk] music business is so discouraging ... you were basically signing up for a vow of poverty. Here was a very gracious, smiling, educated man who loved what you did."

The MacEachrons, who retired in 1984, loved folk and traditional music and traveled as a family to folk festivals in Newport, R.I., and elsewhere before they started making and selling kits for dulcimers, said their daughter Mary O'Driscoll, of Cork City, Ireland. Their motto was, "Music can save the world," she said.

Her dad, an Air Force plane mechanic instructor in World War II, was an inventive man who liked solving problems. He also enjoyed making things, including toys for his kids and sails for his catamaran, she said. He loved dulcimers because they were fairly simple to make and play.

"He became almost evangelical about encouraging people to build and then play their own instruments," she said. "He was into the joy of making music and the fun of it."

MacEachron, whose sole survivor is his daughter Mary, was preceded in death by his wife, Suanna, and daughter Judy.