

Pine Cone Profile, March 2021

Jamie Carter Bollich

Happy March—and happy Saint Patrick’s Day, East Texas Historical Association members! This is the month for celebrating all of Celtic heritage—and what better person to profile than Jamie Carter Bollich! Accomplished journalist, author, and speaker, she brings the Gaelic gifts of imagination and empathy to every presentation she gives, whether it be to historians or genealogists or the interested public. Here, in her own words, is Jamie Bollich:

Where do you live?

I have lived in Beaumont since August of 1973 when I took a job at *The Beaumont Enterprise* after graduating from the University of Texas that May with a journalism degree. I was born in my mom’s hometown of Terrell, Texas, but most of my childhood was spent in Spring Branch, a Houston suburban community which was blessed with much-better-than-average schools. We lived for two years in Fort Worth from 1963-1964. I aspire to move to Lufkin or Nacogdoches eventually, partly to keep my distance from hurricanes.

How long have you been in East Texas Historical Association and what is there about it that keeps you a member?

I’ve been in ETHA for several years, but I can’t recall how many. History has always intrigued me, but the older I get the more I relish it. Through East Texas Historical Association, I’ve met like-minded people who are similarly engrossed by the past. I like to hear their presentations and critique their handling of topics.

What is there about Texas that attracts you?

I appreciate the lush greenness of East Texas. That's the part of the state where I feel at home. Dry, rocky terrain does not ring my chimes. Texas is such a large state that it's more like a small country, with a corresponding bounty of diversity in history, geography, food, culture, and weather.

What is there about history that attracts you?

Curiosity and detective instincts are part of my nature, and I love to probe mysteries and situations from the past, especially when I can correlate them with my ancestors' experiences and get a better feel for what their lives were like. I also love to learn more about my forebears' situations in their home countries of England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and France; the Internet has made that much more feasible. It's fabulous that DNA testing continues to unlock stories that people never expected to surface.

How do you usually pursue history?

I love to read history books, attend conferences, research in libraries and online, tour museums, collect obituaries, seek out old family stories and photos, see quality documentaries, visit cemeteries, make notes, and write about my findings. I've enjoyed helping several adoptees with whom I share DNA to learn more about their birth parents. My family tree on Ancestry is quite helpful in that effort. It was a pivotal moment when I heard that my Wright ancestors had slaves and I discovered distant cousin Herman Wright. I've gotten great pleasure from our joint exploration of our family's background, both White and Black. We co-wrote the historical fiction book *Arvetta* about Herman's grandmother, who was married to the youngest son of the first known mixed-race Wright (Benjamin, born in 1843). I believe that acknowledging all members of one's family, no matter what race they are or how their line evolved, is a huge step toward racial reconciliation. Herman and I have spoken in a number of venues about our ties, and I have branched out on my own as well, speaking about my 95-year-old

father's WWII experiences as a POW of the Germans, told in his book *Just Another Soldier*.

Has there been anything or anyone in your personal life that led to your love of history? What was it? Who was it?

My interest in genealogy propelled me toward the study of Texas history. As I grew up my mother researched our family tree and I benefitted from her information. I remember studying Texas in third grade and being told that the residents of Austin's Colony were the earliest White settlers, but I saw no familiar names in the list of residents. At that time I had no idea that I actually had several kinfolk in Texas that far back. My sixth great-grandfather Beasley Pruitt was in Liberty County before 1820, and soon my Carter and Simmons ancestors moved there, too. My Scottish Wright relatives came to Texas from Louisiana as soon as Mexico offered free land. John Wright, another sixth-great-grandfather, went to what is now Van Zandt County, and his sons Sherod and Alexander came to Jasper County in the 1820s to create a community called Pinetucky, later renamed Magnolia Springs. My paternal grandmother, Dora Wright Carter, was fiercely proud of her heritage and told many family stories that piqued my curiosity.

What is your favorite historical period or historical movement? Why?

I don't think I can choose one historical period or movement as a favorite, but envisioning my ancestors through the centuries brings them to life for me. I can picture peasant forebears eating cabbage soup, thick brown bread and cheese during the Middle Ages. In the 1600s I'm aware that my Brockway ancestor Wolston left London for Old Lyme, Connecticut, missing the plague and the Great Fire. I think of my McNamee kinfolk struggling to find food during the Irish Potato Famine and eventually coming to Fort Smith, Arkansas, at the behest of a priest. John Wright and his bride are said to have fled Scotland by fishing boat on their wedding day from the northeast coast of that country. I'd love to know the details! My Lyons ancestors were among early Georgia residents on Skidaway Island and came as indentured servants. When Natchez Territory was a wild place, my Cole, Forman, and Simmons kin were residents.

Who is your favorite historical person?

George Washington Carver is someone I revere. He grew up as a sickly child, raised by his master's family after his mother's abduction, who loved nature and aspired to be an artist. But as he reached adulthood, he embraced science so he could do more tangible things to improve the world. He encountered obstacles that would have discouraged anyone else, but he never stopped finding ways to achieve the goal of helping his people rise from poverty. It bothers me that, because he had such a humble spirit, some are now cynical about his achievements. Read a biography of his accomplishments if it's been a while since you've thought of him!

If there is one event in history at which you could be present, what would it be? Why?

I'd like to be present at so many events in history, but especially ones that involve my ancestors. It would be scintillating to spend a day with Sherod Wright and his wife Anna Clark in early Jasper County.

I'd like to witness the troubles of my spirited Welsh kinswoman Susannah Griffith, who scandalized her fellow Quakers by marrying a non-Quaker, James Carter, in Penn's Colony.

It would be sobering to be on hand in 1819 when Lyons Point, Louisiana, the plantation home of my ancestor John Lyons, was invaded by some of Lafitte's pirates—they terrorized the family and abducted its slaves. The family was so traumatized that John and his wife Rachael divorced. Why did their son Joseph, a Protestant, marry a Cajun Catholic girl named Mary Ann Guidry when he was only 13 and she was 17?

I muse about my mother's ancestor, James Robert Adair, who lived among Native Americans in the 1700s and wrote the earliest serious book on them, "History of the American Indian."

It would be great to spend time with my great-great uncle Solomon Wright, who kept a journal of his travels (*My Rambles as East Texas Cowboy, Hunter, Fisherman, Tie-Cutter*) which was published in 1942 by the Texas Folklore Society after he mailed it to J. Frank Dobie.

I believe our society needs every bit of perspective it can get as we navigate all the contentious and complicated situations facing us today. History is an important key to understanding and will help us forge a better future.