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First Through Gates of Ellis I, She Was Lost. Now She's Found.

By SAM ROBERTS

Annie Moore is memorialized by bronze statues in New York Harbor and Ireland and cited in story and song as the first of 12 million immigrants to arrive at Ellis Island. Her story, as it has been recounted for decades, is that she went west with her family to fulfill the American dream — eventually reaching Texas, where she married a descendant of the Irish liberator Daniel O'Connell and then died accidentally under the wheels of a streetcar at the age of 46.

The first part of the myth seems authentic enough.

Hustled ahead of a burly German

by her two younger brothers and by an Irish longshoreman who shouted "Ladies first," one Annie Moore from County Cork set foot on Ellis Island ahead of the other passengers from the steamship Nevada on Jan. 1, 1892, her 15th birthday. She was officially registered by the former private secretary to the secretary of the treasury and was presented with a \$10 gold piece by the superintendent of immigration.

"She says she will never part with it, but will always keep it as a pleasant memento of the occasion," The New York Times reported in describing the ceremonies inaugurating Ellis Island.

As for what happened next, though, history appears to have embraced the wrong Annie Moore.

"It's a classic go-West-young-woman tale riddled with tragedy," said Megan Smolenyak Smolenyak, a professional genealogist. "If only it were true."

In fact, according to Mrs. Smolenyak Smolenyak's research, the Annie Moore of Ellis Island fame settled on the Lower East Side, married a bakery clerk and had 11 children. She lived a poor immigrant's life, but her descendants multiplied and

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many prospered.

The story of the immigrant girl who went west, however, became so commonly accepted that even descendants of the Annie Moore who died in Texas came to believe it. Over the years, several have been invited to participate at ceremonies on Ellis Island and in Ireland.

It took some genealogical detective work to find the proper Annie. After offering a \$1,000 reward on the Internet a few months ago for information about Annie Moore, Mrs. Smolenyak Smolenyak teamed up with New York City's commissioner of records, Brian G. Andersson, and discovered the woman who they have concluded is, in fact, the iconic Annie Moore.

Joined by several of her descendants, they are scheduled to announce the results of their research tomorrow at the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society in Manhattan.

Mrs. Smolenyak Smolenyak (a genealogist's dream: she's a Smolenyak married to a previously unrelated Smolenyak) became interested in Annie Moore four years ago while researching a documentary film on immigration. Pursuing the paper trail, she found that the Annie who died instantly when struck by a streetcar near Fort Worth in 1923 was not an immigrant at all but was apparently born in Illinois. Moreover, she traced that Moore family to Texas as early as 1880.

"I realized it was the wrong Annie," she recalled.

Then, what had happened to the Ellis Island Annie?

Mrs. Smolenyak Smolenyak made

little progress for a few years, but her search was reinvigorated this year after she moved to southern New Jersey and visited a genealogical exhibition in Philadelphia featuring a 1910 photograph of the Texas Annie. (The photograph might also have been a model for Jeanne Rynhart's two bronze sculptures, one of which is at Ellis Island.)

She posted a challenge on her blog for information about the immigrant Annie Moore. She also mentioned it to Mr. Andersson, who she knew was very interested in genealogy.

"With the power of the Internet and a handful of history geeks we cracked this baby in six weeks," she said. "Brian found this one document, and we knew we had the right family. We had the smoking gun."

What Mr. Andersson found was the naturalization certificate belonging

to Annie's brother Phillip, who arrived with her on the steamship. He was also listed in the 1930 census with a daughter, Anna. They found Anna in the Social Security death index. That identification led to her son, who is Annie Moore's great-nephew.

On her first try, Mrs. Smolenyak Smolenyak was lucky enough to find the great-nephew listed in a directory. "As soon as I said 'Annie Moore,' he knew instantly — 'That's us,'" she said. "They had been overlooked, but they had sort of resigned themselves. I think they're very happy to be found."

Her \$1,000 reward is to be split between Mr. Andersson, who is donating it, and Annie's great-niece.

As for Edward P. Wood, a New Jersey plumbing contractor who is descended from the Texas Annie

Moore and has been feted on Ellis Island, Mrs. Smolenyak Smolenyak said that when she told him of her findings, he said, "I'm disappointed, but I'm not heartbroken."

The Annie Moore who arrived in steerage and inaugurated Ellis Island initially joined her parents, who had arrived several years earlier, apparently in a five-story brick tenement at 32 Monroe Street in Manhattan. (One of many problems that complicated Mrs. Smolenyak Smolenyak's search, she said, is there is also a 32 Monroe Street in Brooklyn.)

Records indicate that Annie Moore later moved to, among other places, a nearby apartment on New Chambers Street — near the Newsboys' Lodging House and the Third Avenue El on the Bowery.

The area now includes the Alfred E. Smith Houses, a public project

constructed in the early 1950's and named for the governor who grew up nearby, and the Knickerbocker Village complex of rental apartments built in the 1930's.

"She had the typical hardscrabble immigrant life," Mrs. Smolenyak Smolenyak said. "She sacrificed herself for future generations."

According to her latest research, Annie's father was a longshoreman. She married a bakery clerk. They had at least 11 children. Five survived to adulthood and three had children of their own. She died of heart failure in 1924 at 47. Her brother Anthony, who arrived with Annie and Philip on the Nevada, died in his 20's in the Bronx and was temporarily buried in potter's field.

Annie lived and died within a few square blocks on the Lower East Side, where some of her descendants lived until just recently. She is buried with 6 of her 11 children (five infants and one who survived to 21) alongside the famous and forgotten in a Queens cemetery.

Her living descendants include great-grandchildren, the great-nephew and the great-niece. One of the descendants is an investment counselor and another a Ph.D.

Mrs. Smolenyak Smolenyak described them as "poster children" for immigrant America, with Irish, Jewish, Italian and Scandinavian surnames. "It's an all-American family," she said. "Annie would have been proud."

So far, this turns out to be one of the few cases in which historical revisionism may have enhanced a legacy instead of subverting it. As one guidebook says: "Annie Moore came to America bearing little more than her dreams; she stayed to help build a country enriched by diversity."



Ozier Muhammad/The New York Times



Ellis Island Immigration Museum

Jeanne Rynhart's Ellis Island statue of Annie Moore, holding her hat in the harbor breeze, was unveiled in 1993. At right, the Annie Moore who died in Texas, once thought to have been the first at Ellis Island.