Our History is a regular column by Kate Rauhauser-Smith, Director of Education and Programs at the Mount Airy Museum of Regional History, examining the region's history on display at the museum.

As I've been told many times since moving to Mount Airy in 2005, I'm "not from around here." I grew up in Pennsylvania's gently rolling farm country. I've always loved history. It's a passion I learned at the knee of my Pappaw who took the family to many battlefields and historic sites when I was small. He cherished and, more importantly, shared the stories he'd grown up with about our early family who settled the state in the 18th century and he kept me wide-eyed with tales of his grandfather watching the Confederates march right passed the house in the sweltering heat of 1863. It made me feel anchored to that place in ways I never understood until we moved 450 miles away.

From our earliest days here I've been fascinated by people's stories. There are cousins here of George Washington, Presidents George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush, and Sequoyah, the man who developed an alphabet for the Cherokee language. I've had tiny ladies of great age tell me their family stories of the Yankee troops camping at the south end of town and it seems everyone knows someone with artifacts from the Native America village when it was disturbed by the Proctor-Silex construction. Museums, for me, are wonderful places filled with treasures just like my great grandma's attic. Each bit and bauble holds a story. Some of the stories are tied together. Some stand alone, incomplete because no one remembers who wrote that letter or whose sweet face peers through the ages from that long-ago day when someone took a picture. I held one of those orphaned memories late last year, a simple piece of blue-lined school paper, brown with age, and covered in a spidery scrawl and uncertain spelling.

"August the Second 1895," it reads, "Being the day on which I am sixteen years old I propose to keep a general record of what time I remain here" The author, who was unknown at the time, was clearly a farm boy, he stacked oats, cut buckwheat, went to 'preaching,' made cider with his cousins, and helped Grandpa bring in hay. He traveled to Hillsville that month to see men put in jail for fighting and for selling brandy. The boy talked of helping his uncles, Enoch Webb and WL Martin, with chores but never identified himself, and so it was a mystery … Until this week. As I cast about for the subject of this, my first column for The Mount Airy News, I was drawn back to that diary letter and the mystery boy. I asked Amy Snyder, the museum's curator, what she knew about it. Only that it came from papers from Miss Neeta Webb's estate in the late 90s,

she said.

On a whim I searched online for information about Miss Webb and found her father was OB Webb…who had been born on Aug 2, 1879…16 years before the diary was written. His father had several siblings, one named Enoch and a sister Stella Mae who'd married Wyatt L. Martin. We had our boy. Continuing to search online and through the many pictures we got from the estate, we know Obe was a tall, lanky boy with black hair and striking blue eyes born near Laurel Fork, Carroll County, Virginia. We also know he is first cousin twice removed of Mount Airy Mayor David Rowe, whose mother was a Webb.

A 1928 biographical sketch of O.B. (as he styled his name in adulthood) says he had a talent for mechanics. He was hired to build a bandsaw for Mount Airy lumber yard and he stayed, establishing a plumbing business on Main Street. He had a hand in several businesses and was a Mason, a Shriner and a member of the Kiwanis Club here. The Webbs have been in Carroll County since about 1835 when it seems the entire clan and several other families moved from Grayson County. The Martins, Goads, Nesters, Edwards, and others seem to have been living in community for generations, moving from Franklin to Grayson not long after the Revolution, then into Carroll County and many continuing to move south into Surry. Members of each family have served in the Revolution, the War of 1812, the Civil War, and both World Wars.

There are pieces and clues of thousands of regional stories tucked away in the archives here and many thousands more waiting to be unearthed. What's hiding in your attic? That box under Grandma's bed or at the back of the old tobacco barn? Let me know if you have questions about items in the museum. I welcome history and family stories passed down to you. Share them to my email and we'll explore the answers through this column. KRSmith@NorthCarolinaMuseum.org or by calling 336-786-4478 x228