

My Relationship to the Ream Family

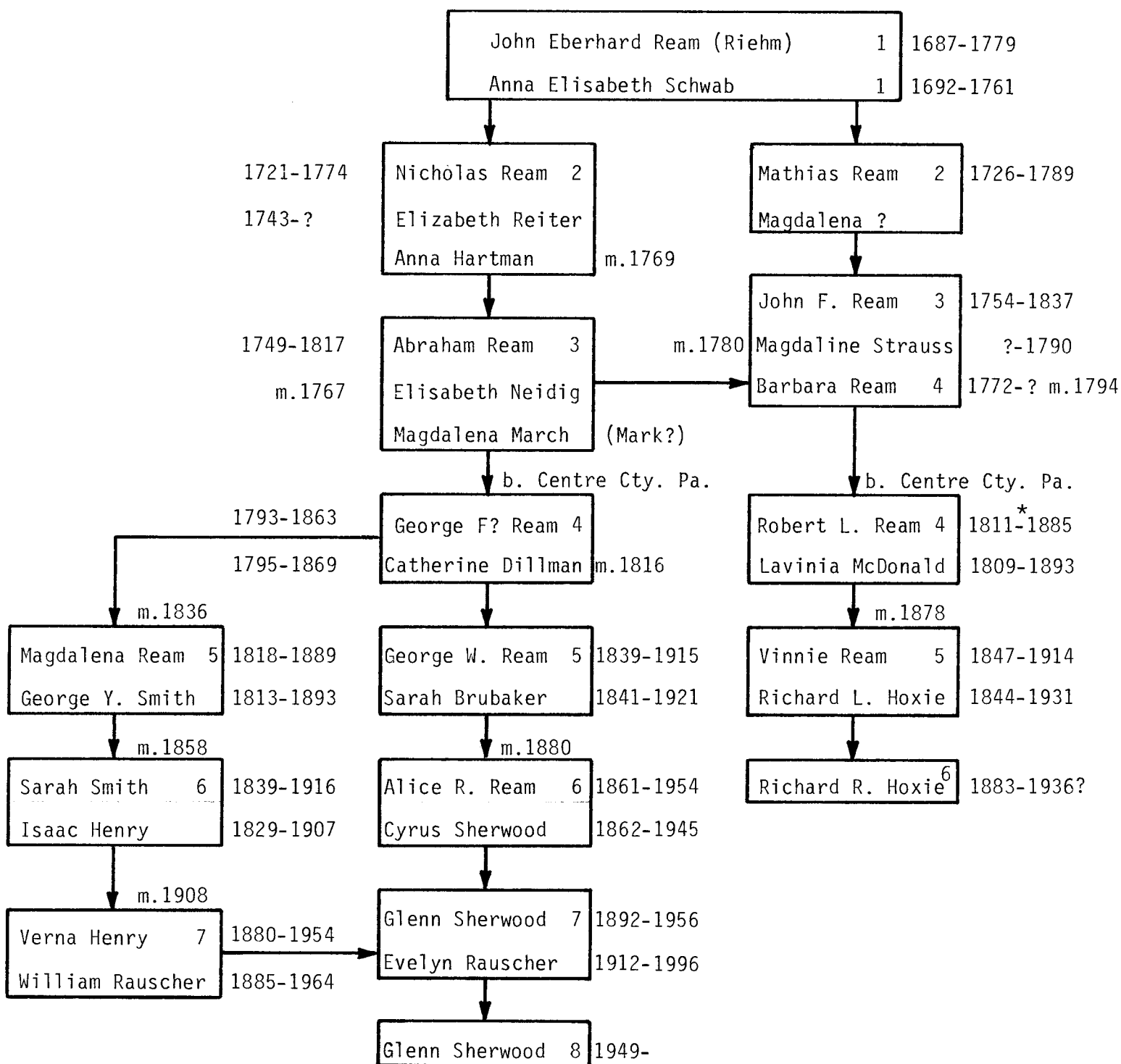
Glenn V. Sherwood

When I began researching the American woman sculptor Vinnie Ream (Hoxie) in 1987, I knew that I was related to the Ream family through both parents, but I didn't know the exact family connection. On my father's side, his parents had been pioneer settlers in Kansas. Cyrus and Alice Sherwood arrived in Scott County in 1886, then settled in Stanton County in 1887 about nine miles southeast of "Johnson City" where they lived in a dugout. My grandfather Cyrus worked windlassing dirt out of dug wells for one dollar a day. He later became a section foreman on the railroad after they moved back to Scott City in 1888. They later obtained land in Ness County in 1890 and built a sod house about 1 mile west of the present town of Arnold. They had a family of 9 children under crude conditions.

Grandmother Alice Sherwood's maiden name was Ream. She was a daughter of George Washington Ream who filed a claim on 160 acres of land in Kansas in 1886 and built a sod house about 2 miles east of Modoc (about 7 miles west of the present town of Scott City and south of highway 96). His father was George F. Ream, who was born in Centre County Pennsylvania, where Vinnie Ream's father was born. I can also trace my relationship to the Ream family through my other grandmother Verna Rauscher. Her maiden name was Henry. Her grandparents were George Y. Smith and Magdalena Ream Smith. Her grandmother was a daughter of George F. Ream. George F. Ream was a half-brother of Vinnie Ream's grandmother Barbara. Their father Abraham served in the Revolutionary War. The chart I made in 1988 shows the family relationship. I was able to make the chart using the 1939 book by D.L. Denniston and a document from a reunion of the Smith/Ream cousins held in Plainfield, Illinois in the 1930s.

The Homestead Act of 1862 was implemented as an incentive for settlers to populate the western lands of the United States. It excluded Confederate soldiers or sympathizers but allowed a qualified homesteader to acquire 160 acres or a quarter-section of land and become the owner in five years if they lived there and met the conditions. Many found it easier and safer to buy land from *honest* speculators, or from the railroad companies, who owned huge tracts of land for miles on both sides of their lines. They sold land for \$3 to \$5 per acre, but the sale usually brought an immediate title, could often be made on credit with deferred payments and could provide more desirable tracts. It was said that Ream traveled to Wakeeney to file on the claim he staked out in Scott County. The Land Office in Garden City was said to be so packed with claim filers that the staff came and went by a ladder hung out a back window to avoid the crowds. In addition to Horace Greeley's calling, the railroad companies (who were eager to develop business along their lines) advertised in the east and in Europe and offered special "immigrant fares" as an incentive for settlers to "go west." It brought a flood of immigrants from Europe. One problem that the settlers encountered in the more arid states like Kansas and Colorado was that a very large piece of land was needed to diversify and make a crop that was of much commercial value and 160 acres might barely sustain a family. Dry-land farming often required letting half of the land lie fallow for a year to renew while the other half was worked.

More free land incentives were enacted to encourage tree planting and irrigation. Deep wells powered by windmills provided water, but well depths of 200 feet were not uncommon. Water might be 5 feet or 500 feet below the surface. Most settlers could not afford the 1 dollar/foot that a well driller may want. In Stanton County grandmother Sherwood walked 3/4 of a mile to get two buckets of water each day while Cyrus walked 9 miles to town where he boarded and worked during the week. They eventually had their own well in Ness County. Pioneers encountered many problems on the open prairie. Grasshoppers could devour crops and the winter of 1886 was one of the worst on record. Cattle perished in blizzards or had their ears and tails frozen off. The hot prairie winds could scorch crops and fires lasting several weeks could spread on the grasslands and engulf tens of thousands of acres. Sod houses were constructed because they were fire-proof and because it was a natural use of the prairie grasslands. Timber was scarce and expensive to import and trees were often confined to prime wooded areas near rivers, far from a homestead site. The sod house could be built in a week with an acre of sod and with a few dollars in materials. It was cool in the summer and warm in the winter, but it had its drawbacks. Mice might burrow in the walls and insects would drop from the ceiling and snakes might try to occupy a corner of the dwelling. Muslin sheet ceilings might catch the insects, but it often didn't stop the rain. Poorly designed roofs leaked and the entire structure could collapse if it was not well-planned. Ventilation was a problem and smoke could accumulate inside from a fire unless it had a good "cat and clay" chimney or stove pipe with a good draw. Fuel for fires could be scarce on the prairie. My grandmother Sherwood wrote of seeing buffalo chips burned for fuel and special stoves were used to burn hay or corn cobs. Coal was used too, if available. A meal might be "White pot" or cornmeal with milk, eggs and molasses or fried mush with dried meat or jerky cured in brine and parched-rye coffee and sorghum sugar. Living and even survival on the prairie required a frugal mentality, discipline, good planning and resourcefulness. It was a great testament to the tenacity of these people that they withstood the trials and learned to live with the land.



My relationship to Vinnie Ream's family. -Glenn V. Sherwood (jr.) April, 1988

* The 1811 date for Ream's birth comes from the 1939 book by E.L. Denniston. Other sources have given Robert Ream's year of birth as 1809.



The Ream family sod house (built 1887) about 7.5 miles west of Scott City(1890 photo)



Sarah and George W. Ream (above) are on the right with their 3 daughters and son Norman to the left. Also pictured is John Stout and Cory Van Antwerp (on the far left).

George W. Ream and his wife Sarah (Brubaker) Ream (left) were early Kansas pioneer settlers who had first acquired land in the Scott County region in the 1880s.



The graves of George W. and Sarah Ream are at the cemetery southeast of Ransom, Kansas next to the graves of Cyrus and Alice (Ream) Sherwood.



The Sherwood's sod house was even featured on postcards (left) with the caption "Early Days in Kansas."



The Sherwood family at the sod house about 1 mile west of Arnold, KS (1912 photo?)