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New England Historic Genealogical Society

American Ancestors

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The screenshot shows a Mozilla Firefox browser window displaying the American Ancestors website. The page features the organization's logo, a navigation menu with 'SEARCH | LIBRARY | RESOURCES | PUBLICATIONS | STORE', and a 'Join NEHGS!' button. The main content area is titled 'Daily Genealogist' and includes a calendar for May 2012. A blog post titled 'The Daily Genealogist: The "A Hundred Years Ago" Blog' is featured, with a photo of Lynn Betlock, Editor. The post text reads: 'I'd like to share a blog called "A Hundred Years Ago," written by Sheryl Lazerus. When Ms. Lazerus's paternal grandmother, Helena (Muffly) Swartz, died in 1980, her children found a diary the teenage Helena had kept from January 1911 through December 1914. At the time Helena was writing, she was living in Northumberland County in central Pennsylvania, about a mile outside of McEwensville.'

## [The Daily Genealogist: The "A Hundred Years Ago" Blog](#)

**Lynn Betlock**  
**Editor**

I'd like to share a blog called "[A Hundred Years Ago](#)," written by Sheryl Lazerus. When Ms. Lazerus's paternal grandmother, Helena (Muffly) Swartz, died in 1980, her children found a diary the teenage Helena had kept from January 1911 through December 1914. At the time Helena was writing, she was living in Northumberland County in central Pennsylvania, about a mile outside of McEwensville.

Ms. Lazerus made a copy of the diary and, she writes, it "laid in a paper bag in the bottom of my hutch for more than 20 years until I pulled it out in January 2010 and started reading." Ms. Lazerus started her blog to showcase the entries from her grandmother's diary, and she posts

each entry exactly 100 years after it was written. The brief entries are followed by Ms. Lazerus's commentary on the text and an in-depth examination of a related topic.

I particularly like the rich historical context that Ms. Lazerus added to help readers understand the world her grandmother experienced. Topics include "1912 Dresses That Could Be Made for One Dollar"; Longfellow's *Evangeline*, which Helena read; discussion of Helena's deportment grade; and "Average Height for Males and Females in 1912 and 2012." The posts are organized into the following categories: the Central Pennsylvania towns of McEwensville, Milton, Turbotville, and Watsonstown; crafts and sewing; education; family memories; farming and Grandma; food; friends; genealogy; health; holidays; other; rural life; and statistics.

Ms. Lazerus writes: "My memories of Grandma Helen were of a feeble, elderly woman — Helena (the name she used in the diary) was a fun-loving, self-absorbed teen. Helena wasn't an Anne Frank — and most days she only wrote three or four lines. Some days she wrote that 'nothing of importance' had occurred. Yet as I tried to decipher the handwriting a fascinating young woman emerged, and I wanted to learn more about her and how she evolved into the grandmother I remember."

I think "A Hundred Years Ago" provides a terrific model for making a primary source written by an ancestor relevant today. Ms. Lazerus has greatly enhanced the entries with her research and reflections, and made her grandmother's diary much more meaningful for both herself and her readers.