"Nevertheless the winter wears on and death follows death. I've tried it, and know how the narrowing-down feeling conflicts with the feeling of life's coming to a point, not a climax but a point. At that point one must, yes, be selective, but not selective in one's choices if you see what I mean. Not choose this or that because it pleases,

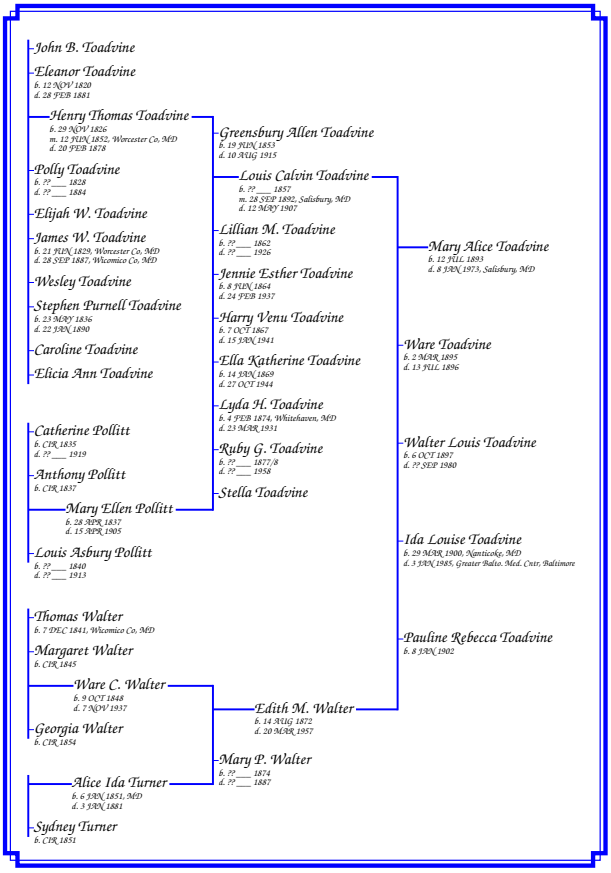

Figure 1: Alice's Ancestors

merely to assume the idea of choosing, so that some things can be left behind. It doesn't matter which ones. I could tell you about some of the things I've discarded but that wouldn't help you because you must choose your own, or rather not choose them but let them be inflicted on and off you. This is the point of the narrowing-down process. And gradually, as the air gets thinner as you climb a mountain, these things will stand forth in a relief all their own — the look of belonging. It is a marvelous job to do, and it is enough just to approximate it. Things will do the rest. Only then will the point of not having everything become apparent, and it will flash on you with such dexterity and such terribleness that you will wonder how you lived before — as though a valley hundreds of miles in length and full of orchards and all sorts of benevolent irregularities of landscape were suddenly to open at your feet, just as you told yourself you could not climb a step higher. This casual, poorly seen new environment (but how gladly you are aware of imperfect vision, this time!) is to be a new kind of arbitrariness for you, one that protects and promotes without ever leaving the time-inflicted lesions of the old, toward which you struggled so hard without knowing it. These are vanished with the saw-toothed anomalies of time itself, and an open, moist, impregnable order of the day — kind, generous and protective — surrounds you as the artless gestures of a beautiful girl surround her with nobility which may never be detected, the fountain of one's life. And one never need wish to see it, for its truth does not matter, and is unimaginable."

— excerpt from John Ashbery's "The New Spirit" (in Three Poems)