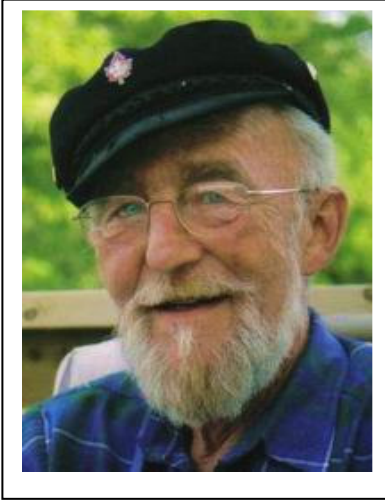


The Family Historian

Patrick Wohler

Column #14

Municipal Records



The most common municipal records of interest to family historians are the Assessment and Collectors Rolls. They were created for taxation purposes and include mainly information on land and buildings and whether the owner was a public or separate school supporter. Sometimes they also include information on the property owner's age, occupation and number of children.

Other municipal records of interest are Local Censuses, Voters Lists, School Lists and Poll Books, all of which can confirm who was where and when.

Many municipal records, especially for southern Ontario, 1840-1900, are housed in the Archives of Ontario in Toronto and microfilm copies can frequently be found in the archives of the municipality that created them. The legislation governing these has been recently revised and the responsibility for

maintaining municipal records and making them available to the public is now mandated to the municipality. My understanding is that the Archives of Ontario wants to download their municipal records to the municipal archives.

The Canadian Council of Archives has an on-line directory of archives on their web site at: www.cdnCouncilarchives.ca/intro.html. You can type in the name of the municipality whose archives you want, get contact information and find out what their holdings are. If there is no listing for that municipality, try the county. If you can't find the municipal records that you want, the city clerk is the best source to approach.

Old Diseases

Have you come across ancestors who suffered or died from diseases that were unfamiliar to you? Sometimes dictionaries are not all that helpful unless you have some medical knowledge. They might give you the symptoms but not usually what it is called today. I checked 'Dropsy' and the dictionary reported that it was "edema caused by excess serous fluid". This translates to swelling caused by fluid around the heart and is known today as congestive heart failure. There are many others that I have run across and I am sure you have too. Camp Fever, Brain Fever, Chilblain have all impacted our ancestors at one time or another.

Perhaps the best way to sort these out is to speak to a physician, but in some places that is not as easy as it once was. Several internet sites are designed to help. There is a good list and links to other sites at: <http://homepages.rootsweb.com/~haas/learningcenter/diseasesold.html>, and http://www.paul_smith.doctors.org.uk/ArchaicMedicalTerms.htm. The latter is a little more complete and sometimes gives sources for the author's findings.

You will often find that several members of a family died in a short time frame and might wonder if there was some epidemic at the time. There is an excellent list of epidemics in Ontario at: <http://www.rootsweb.com/~canon/research-topic-deaths-epidemics.html>.

Rootsweb Searches

When you are searching for a surname on Rootsweb message boards, they advise that the greatest number of matches can be obtained by entering the surnames using all lower-case letters such as "peacock" or "green" or "brothers" (but don't use the quotation marks). It turns out that these message board searches are case sensitive with the exception of all lower case searches. This means that if you use all lower-case to search for peacock, it will find all the peacock, Peacock, and PEACOCK entries.
