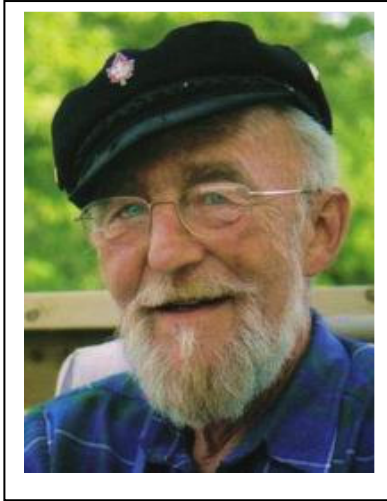


The Family Historian

Patrick Wohler

Column #15

The GenWeb Solution



When undertaking family history research on the internet you quickly discover that there is so much that you are likely to feel swamped. The internet is like an enormous library in which the books are randomly shelved. A search engine will turn up an enormous number of sites, many of which have nothing to do with your search and may be of very uneven quality. I did a 'Google' search for "Arnprior Ontario" (the quotation marks require that both words appear in the site) and turned up 2,830 sites!

One of the solutions is to find someone who has already collected and organized the kind of sites you need. This is where the world-wide GenWeb project comes in. It is a project of enormous scope and vision, volunteer-run and hosted on the web by Rootsweb. It is organized geographically and if you go to:

<http://www.worldgenweb.org/>, you can select the country you want.

That page will contain national information and links to other sites with that kind of information. It will also list major geographical/political divisions of the country and you can select the

one you want (In Canada it is provinces and territories) and here you will find information and links for provincial genealogy, along with a list of the next level down (in Ontario it is the 54 counties and districts) and you can select the county you are interested in. This is usually where you hit paydirt. There is all kinds of help on researching that county and links to other organizations, repositories and on-line databases that can help you. Try it out and you will be amazed at the resources you can easily find.

Old Job Names

Many of our family names derive from the kind of work our ancestors did. A baxter was a baker, a bridger was the toll keeper for a bridge, a carter drove a delivery wagon, a dempster was a judge, a fuller was a person who used fuller's earth to thicken and cleanse cloth, by treading it under water.

We also find some strange occupations listed in census returns or old family papers. A cainer was a person who made walking sticks, a gummer improved old saws by deepening the cuts, a fulker was a pawnbroker, and a blindsman was someone employed by the post office to deal with incorrectly addressed letters and parcels.

Dictionaries, especially older ones, are loaded with these little treasures and several people have collected them in alphabetical order on websites. Here is one of them:

<http://www.gendocs.demon.co.uk/trades.html#TOP>,

Voters Lists

Voters Lists can be a way of establishing where someone was at a given time but the absence of a name from the Voters List does not mean that they were not there. These lists have to be used with some caution because they are subject to who had the right to vote at that time.

The Dominion Elections Act (SC1900, c.12) specified that one had to be eligible to vote in provincial elections to be allowed to vote in a federal one. This restricted it (in many places) to men who owned property and were not members of racial or religious minorities. The property restrictions were dropped and the franchise extended to women for federal elections in 1920. The franchise was extended to women for provincial elections between 1916 (the Prairie Provinces) and 1940 (Québec). The race restrictions in federal elections were repealed in 1948.

Before 1935, local/municipal/provincial voters lists were used for federal elections. You can often find the Poll Books or Voters Lists in the local /county archives.

From 1935, federal Voters Lists are in RG113 at the National Archives. They are microfilmed by electoral district and you can check annual Canadian Almanacs or City Directories, in a local library, to determine the electoral district for a given place.