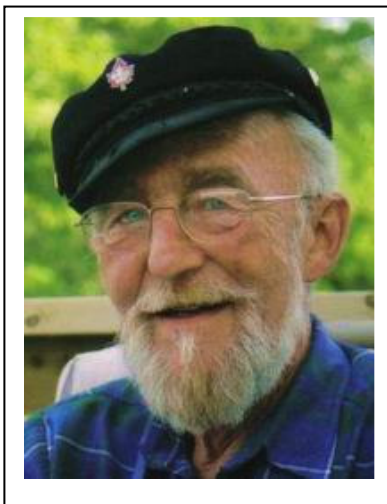


The Family Historian

Patrick Wohler

Column #39

Company Newsletters



If your ancestor worked for a large company in the twentieth century, like the railroad or a large mill, or a government department, there is a good chance that the company had some kind of staff newsletter or magazine. These are narrowly targeted publications and can be less than stimulating reading if you are not part of their demographic but do look for them.

You may well find that your ancestor was profiled when he or she reached a significant milestone, like twenty-five years' service or retirement. They would likely include information about your ancestor that may not otherwise be available to you and will also help to give you a flavor of what their working life was like.

The Public Relations Department of the Company is the most likely to be willing and able to help you out. If the company no longer exists, don't despair. Usually when a company is bought out by another, its papers go with it, so the new parent company may have them in their archives.

Even if that fails, there is a fair chance that some archives has collected that company's papers. You can find out by going to: www.cdncouncilarchives.ca/directory.html . This is a very useful search site, in fact it is a portal to archival holdings across Canada. Type the name of the company you are looking for in the search box and they will respond with a list of archives that hold papers of that company. The name of the archives is actually a hotlink and clicking on it will take you to a page with all the contact information to reach them, usually including e-mail addresses.

I used it recently and found the papers of a flour milling company at the archives in the University of Manitoba.

Like you, your ancestors spent a big portion of their life in the workplace and knowing a little more about that phase will help you to know them a little better.

Subscription Internet Sites

A number of readers have commented on the frustration of tracking some information on the internet, only to land up at the point where if you REALLY want that information you have to have a paid subscription. I certainly agree with them and the only protection is experience recognizing the cues about where you are going.

There are a number of writers in Family History literature who ardently feel that all this wonderful material should be free- but I am not one of them. I certainly get annoyed when I get stonewalled by a demand for a subscription but I recognize the enormous time and work involved in gathering the sources, formatting them for the internet, and, making them available.

I don't subscribe to any of them but that is because of economics, not principle. They aren't cheap and no one site has it all. Ancestry.com is the biggest player in this arena and hosts the largest collection of Family History records on the web. Their supersubscription is 'only' US \$ 189.95. You can buy a limited subscription for certain types of documents, but you know that within a day you will need something that is outside that range.

My suggestion is to gather up all the requests that you would like to make if you had a subscription, then keep bombarding them but stop when you hit the 'pay here' window. They monitor this and soon you will receive an offer from them for a free trial period - go for it. You have all your requests ready so you should be able to make some headway at no cost. Be sure to cancel your trial subscription or you will find yourself as a paid subscriber.

Ancestry.com also owns Rootsweb, which is the largest FREE source of genealogical help on the internet - so they have their good points too.