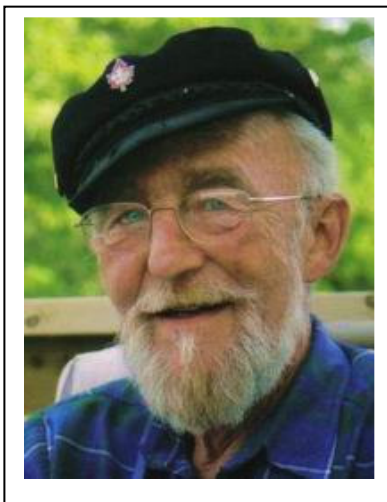


The Family Historian

Patrick Wohler

Column #4

"Facts" in Conflict



Every researcher runs into conflicting evidence at some point. This is one reason why we must know where our information has come from to compare the reliability of the two sources. The degree of reliability of a source is usually a factor of:

- 1- How soon after the event the record was created
- 2- The credibility of the person who made the record
- 3- The reason why the record was made
- 4- Corroboration with other evidence

The transcript of a birth certificate is not as reliable as a photo of the original because it was made later and there is the possibility of an error in the transcription. If three people tell the same story but they all learned it from the same original source then they do not corroborate each other. A baptismal record signed by a minister or priest is excellent evidence of the

date of baptism but, if it includes the age of the infant, that information is less reliable because it is based on what someone told him, not on his own knowledge.

Tombstones and censuses are very useful sources of information but they are riddled with errors and of low reliability. An error in an inscription cannot be corrected and maybe nobody cared at the time. The census is based on uncorroborated statements by people who may not know when they were born or not care or don't want to admit their age. In any event the useful data they contain needs to be corroborated by original documents of high reliability.

Bulletin Boards and Mailing Lists

If you have internet access, these may be of interest. Bulletin Boards are websites where you can post a query that will be seen by everyone using that Board. Mailing Lists have similar functions but the queries are e-mailed to all subscribers. There are Boards for geographical regions and for family names, as well as for a variety of special topics and they are free. To find a Board or List that interests you, go to: <http://boards.ancestry.com/mbexec?htx=main&r=rw> and look for the county or name you want. It is a great way to meet other researchers of similar interests. It is very important when you post a query that you identify the nature of the query in your topic as clearly as possible so that a reader will know if they are likely to be able to help without having to open up your message.

Many researchers monitor the Boards of interest to them and are happy to help when they can. Why not check out a few Boards to get a feel for them?

Coded Communications

Communication among family researchers sometimes has a tendency to the overuse of acronyms. These are fine as long as everyone knows what they mean but some are not in the dictionary and could pose problems for some readers. Here are a few:

SKS - Some kind soul

LNU - Last name unknown

FNU - First name unknown

NMN - No middle name

NMI - No middle initial

One researcher has developed a whole set for recording tombstones. Here are a few of his:

ILMO - In Loving Memory of

wfa - Who Fell Asleep

Have you found some or developed some that you would like to share?