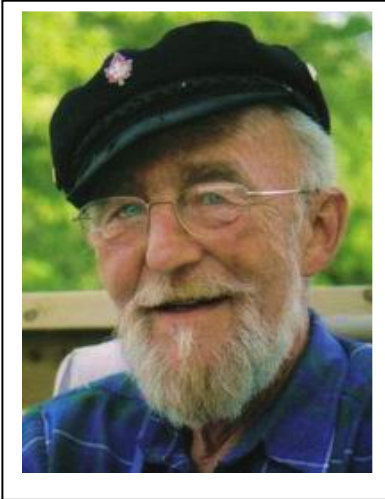


Pitfalls of Enthusiasm



Novice researchers occasionally are in a bit of a hurry to probe earlier generations. This leaping into history with insufficient data often leads only to disappointment and frustration. It is easy enough to find a name on a census or passenger list, for example, but how can you know for certain that it is the person you are looking for and not someone else with the same name?

My personal rule of thumb is that I need at least three pieces of solid and significant information on an individual before it is worthwhile to start looking directly for that person. Furthermore, I make every effort to know the name of their spouse as one of those pieces of critical data.

Recently I tried to trace an individual. I knew his name, his daughter's name, when he came to Canada, where he came from (U.S.A.), and the fact that he was a brewer. That is still all I know about that person. What I knew about him was just not enough to distinguish him from lots of other people of the same name in the

same country at the same time.

This is why all authorities advise starting with yourself and working backwards. Your birth and baptismal records will usually list both your parents' names and either specify or suggest where they were living, what church they attended, etc., all of which suggest other sources for documentation.

Now you want to find their marriage record. This will usually provide the names of your grandparents. With this information you can back up and find your parents birth records and your grandparents' marriage records and in this way you can slowly and carefully work your way back through the various generations.

There are all kinds of resources available to help us find these records and we have discussed a number of them in this column and will certainly be looking at a lot more.

The other hard lesson for many beginners is that not everything is on the internet. It is also true that not everything on the internet is valid or reliable information. The internet, however, does provide an increasing breadth of resources that can provide data and direct us to the repositories or other sources for the data we need.

Thank You

Recently I have been hearing a number of complaints from volunteers who respond to researchers' queries, especially but not exclusively from the internet. It seems that many people just expect the volunteers to do this work and don't even thank them for it. The ingratitude is beginning to rankle.

I must admit that it makes me feel a little smug because I certainly don't have that problem with readers who contact me. However I have encountered it with queries that come in from GenWeb sites where I am registered and I would guess that about 25% of people don't bother to whip off a 'Thank You' reply. It is also often the case that these are the ones on which you have put in a lot of time.

So this is just a reminder that if you use these services, please don't forget to say thanks or we are going to lose some of these valuable volunteers.

Local Histories Online

If you would like to know more about the place where your ancestor lived, you might want to give this site a try: <http://www.ourroots.ca/>. You can actually read these publications on-line. I did a search for "Lanark" and got two hits: Jack *Brown's Historical Sketches of Appleton*, and Rev. George Buchanan's autobiographical, *The Pioneer Pastor* (He was the first Presbyterian minister in Beckwith).