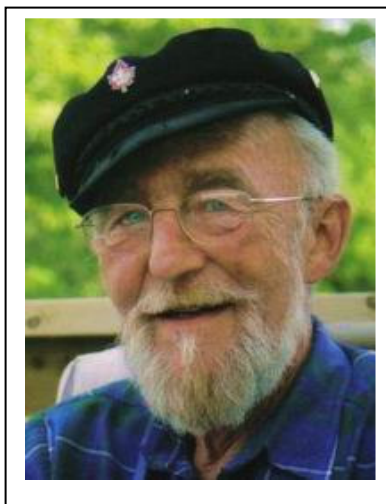


# The Family Historian

## Patrick Wohler

Column #5

### Finding the County



Many vital records are maintained on a county basis in Canada and the United States, so it is important to be able to identify the county that your ancestor was in. Most libraries will have an Atlas in their reference section in which you can find that information but, if you have internet access, here are a few sites that can help:

For places in Canada: [http://geonames.nrcan.gc.ca/index\\_e.php](http://geonames.nrcan.gc.ca/index_e.php). Click on "Query by Name" and scroll down the page filling in data where you can. For "Feature Type", I use "All" because if you select 'town' and it isn't actually 'a town', the search engine will not find the record. A friendlier site for Ontario locations is: <http://www.geneofun.on.ca/ontariolocator/> Select the "Search" option and type in the name of the place you are looking for.

For places in the United States here are two very useful sites: [http://geonames.usgs.gov/pls/gnis/web\\_query.gnis\\_web\\_query\\_form](http://geonames.usgs.gov/pls/gnis/web_query.gnis_web_query_form)  
<http://resources.rootsweb.com/cgi-bin/townco.cgi>

### Tombstone Data

Tombstones can be excellent sources of information about names, dates, relationships, maiden names, and sometimes even the birthplace. A few notes about the location of the cemetery and of the tombstone in the cemetery can be helpful for subsequent visits and visits by other researchers. Some researchers use tape recorders rather than written notes in a cemetery to avoid the danger of transposing numbers and most of them certainly use cameras. A photograph of the tombstone and one of the area around it can both be helpful.

Reading old weathered, worn, and exfoliated tombstones, however, can sometimes be a bit of a challenge and researchers have come up with all kinds of tricks to solve this problem. We must remember, first of all, that old tombstones are often fragile and should not be unnecessarily or roughly handled. Rubbing dirt into the lettering is not an option that I would use.

The ability to read an inscription is based on the creation of shadows by the different planes of the face and the incised letters and this usually works better very early or very late in the day. One safe technique that often works and is easy to employ is to use a mirror (I use a sheet of aluminum foil) at the side of the stone to reflect sunlight across the face of the stone, which emphasizes the shadows where the lettering is. Another popular one that works well in full sun is to use a spray bottle of water and spray where the lettering is. The water on the face of the stone will dry faster than in the crevices of the letters and they will appear a little darker.

Both these techniques can also be used for photographing the inscriptions. If your camera has a detachable flash and you hold it at the side of the stone to flash across the face, you will also enhance the shadows of the letters.

It is a good idea to check other stones in the area because often families were buried close together and you may find some unknown or unsuspected relatives.

### Finding a Church

If you are trying to find a Catholic Church anywhere in order to ask for a search of their records, here is an internet site that you might find helpful; [http://home.att.net/~Local\\_Catholic/](http://home.att.net/~Local_Catholic/). From the Home Page, select "Geographic Location" and follow the links to the place you are interested in. You can frequently go all the way to a parish's website, if they have one.

The Anglican Church of Canada maintains a somewhat similar site at: <http://www.anglican.ca>. Select "Links", then "Dioceses" and you will be taken to a list of dioceses which often includes their web sites and parish lists.

I have found that it is practically useless to write or e-mail to the pastor but the parish secretary or administrator is more likely to respond. There is sometimes a fee for these services so you might want to inquire about that or offer to pay it and provide them with as much information as you can that will narrow down their search. Even if you pay for the service, please don't forget to send a 'thank you', or the next researcher might not get a very co-operative response.

Another concern is that not everyone in the world speaks English so it is a courtesy as well as a practical concern to send your message in the language of the recipient. If necessary you might check with the County Courthouse where they often keep lists of interpreters or a local university or college for someone to translate your message and the response.