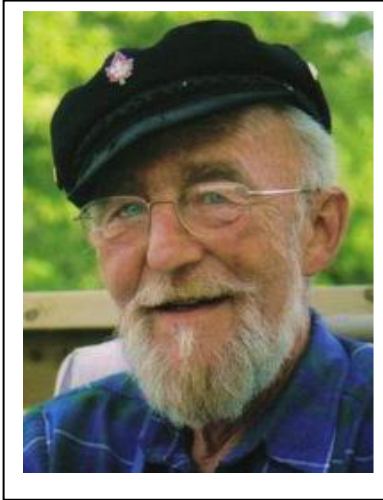


The Family Historian

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Column #68

Looking for Help



Most of us occasionally reach a point where, because of distance, time, language, or other concern, we need someone else to do some of our legwork for us. This does not automatically mean that it is going to cost money, but it might.

The first step is to identify exactly what kind of information we need and what kind of document we would expect to find it in. If you can pin the geographical area of interest down to at least the state or province, then you can go to a Bulletin Board for that area (Rootsweb or GenWeb or both) and ask if anyone can help you find what you are looking for.

If this does not work, then it is time to get a little more aggressive. The area GenWeb site will often list people (known as angels) who will do lookups on specific topics or in specific documents or places and you can contact them.

The local (state/province or county) genealogical society, whose URL will be listed on the GenWeb site, would be my next target. Most of them have members who will do lookups but, at this point, we are starting to talk about cost. They will usually have a search fee and the amount varies but I have rarely seen it more than \$20.00/hr.

Still no luck? Then it is time to go to the archives that is likely to hold the documents you are interested in. Again, their URL is usually listed on the GenWeb site. Most archives have people (often volunteers) who will conduct your research for a fee. If they don't, they will usually have a list of professional genealogists in their area whom you can contact and hire to do your digging.

This becomes even more expensive (perhaps \$25.00 to \$50.00/hr range) and, if it is a simple job, like checking a census, might be a bit of overkill. However, if it saves you the cost of a trip to Tucson, Arizona, it might be worth it to you. It might be a good idea to discuss the matter with someone who does a lot of research to see if there may be a more cost-effective way of obtaining the information you want.

I am certainly not against hiring professional genealogical researchers. That would be cutting off my nose to spite my face, but that is a somewhat different ballgame and we will explore when it might be a good idea and how to go about it in a future column.

The Perils of Translation

I was recently working on some of my own family history and was stumped with some 19th century German documents. Not only do I not speak German but many of these were written in early *Fraktur* script that was designed expressly for the confusion of modern researchers.

Clearly, I needed some help and my good friend Fred Fassbender rose to the occasion. After a few days he called and we met to go over his translations. Everything was fine except for one word. Several of my ancestors had their occupation described as 'kötter'.

Initially Fred didn't even want to translate the term but finally he told me that it meant 'cur' as in 'loud barking dog'. I could believe neighbors calling my ancestors 'curs' but the mind boggled at the thought of a serious looking German official putting it in a public document.

Back home I checked my several German-English dictionaries and then several on-line translation services. The results were the same. Obviously this case was somewhat out of the ordinary and it was time to look for professional help.

Luckily I knew a historian who was also a professional translator from German to English and I sent him an e-mail with all the details. He quickly responded with a report on the word, pointing out that the original translation was correct.

He added, however, that when the word was applied to a person, it derived from a different root and actually meant 'cottager'. It was clearly an older term and no longer in very current use.

There are situations when it really makes sense to go to the experts.