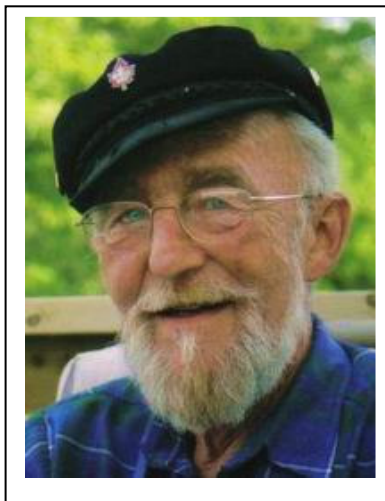


Hiring a Professional



From time to time readers have asked if they should be hiring a professional genealogical researcher to do a specific job for them. This is usually a difficult question to answer. The first key to a response is “Why are you considering it?”.

If you are constrained by time, distance, accessibility, language, or other limitations and you can find no other way around them, then your option is clear. Many researchers will start by exploring other options with you and even dividing the project into parts, some of which you could do yourself, thereby reducing what you need the researcher to do.

Sometimes the problem is actually intimidation. The person is very nervous about a major repository. Occasionally I have invited potential clients to come with me on one of my visits to a repository to help familiarize them with it so that they can work there themselves. Many genealogical societies offer familiarization visits to repositories

in their area and that is a great way to ‘safely’ enter their portals.

If you decide to go the professional route, how do you select your professional? There is an Association of Professional Genealogists that you can check at www.apgen.org for a directory of members. I don’t really believe that membership or non-membership in such organizations really proves very much. Every doctor who was found guilty of malpractice had been a member of the College of Physicians and Surgeons and every lawyer who went astray had been a member of the Bar Association.

Reputation is the best thing to go by. Check with fellow researchers, your local genealogical society, local archives, anyone who may have had occasion to deal with a professional and get their opinion and experience. This is far more valuable than what the researchers say about themselves in slick ads or web pages.

Once you have decided to contact a professional, be prepared for up to several hours of intense discussion. The researcher will want to know what you are looking for and what you have already done, to avoid duplication. Then, what you are looking for may be a little too broad and requires refinement into several research questions, some of which you could probably handle yourself.

At this point, the researcher will likely want to produce a preliminary research strategy. Subsequent research will be based on what is found in the preliminary work, so this first stage is very important and you will probably meet, or, at least, correspond about where to go from there.

How much is this going to cost? You can expect research fees to be somewhere between \$25.00 and \$45.00 per hour. There is not necessarily any correlation between the amount of the fee and the quality of the work, it just happens to be the amount that the researcher decided to charge. The extra costs of copying, photography, certificates, etc, and any extra travel would be billed to you.

The good side of this is that you set the limits. Usually the researcher will estimate how long the preliminary research will take (usually from 3 to 5 hours) and any other costs involved in it. You would usually pay that when it is completed. The researcher will then provide plans and estimates for any supplementary research and you will set a cost ceiling on it.

You can expect the researcher to submit written documented reports, in the format of your choice, along with any recommendations for other work that might be done or resources to be checked.

The hardest thing to accept is that there is no guarantee of success. Lots of documentation has been lost or destroyed or is not accessible, but much of this will be established in the preliminary research.

By all means, try all possible other strategies first, then, and only if you are willing to spend the money, try a professional researcher