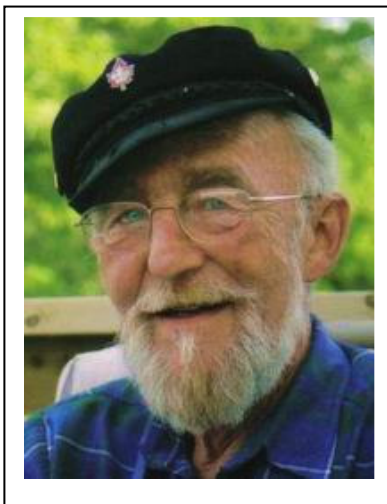


The Family Historian

Patrick Wohler

Column #77

Revisiting Brickwalls



I am a great believer in keeping a research log on questions that I am having trouble with. It includes the name of the person being researched, the research question, and the dates on which I checked various sources along with notes on the source or any information found.

Among other things, it helps to keep me from checking the same source again in a few weeks when I have forgotten what sources I checked. It also helps to keep me focused during a search, when it is so easy to go off on other interesting tangents.

If I exhaust all the possibilities I can think of without solving my problem, then it goes into the 'Brickwall File'. Every three or four months I can then review these logs, see if I can come up with any new ideas or check for new sources that have become available since the last search.

The importance of this review was brought home to me recently when I found a new website on the RAF (www.rafmuseum.org.uk/london/research/enquiries.cfm). It doesn't have a lot of hard information for genealogists but it has a lot of information on other sources that can be quite useful.

I remembered that some months ago I had a query from a reader about someone who served in the Royal Flying Corps and the RAF and I was quite sure that this site was not available at that time. Of course, I did not remember who had sent the query. I went through my files of correspondence with readers (yes, I save all that material) and, in the 91st file, I found Lynda Welch's query. Sure enough, I had not mentioned the site, because it didn't exist at that time, and I was able to update my response with a quick e-mail.

New sources and resources are appearing every week so reviewing those brickwalls is a useful practice.

To Subscribe or not to Subscribe

I recently had an excellent question from reader, Donna Brunelle. She was considering subscribing to an American census program and was looking for another opinion.

Regular readers will know that I am not wildly enthusiastic about subscription services but, in the final analysis, it comes down to 'are you likely to get your money's worth?' In the case of the Census service you would have immediate access any time you want it and you could even search for people if you didn't know the specific locality your ancestor lived in.

Would you be doing enough of these searches to justify the \$200.00 price tag? If, in some cases, you might otherwise have to have someone actually check it out for you, each of those checks could cost \$25.00.

On the other hand, the indexed 1880 US Census is available free at www.familysearch.org . Most genealogical societies have indexed the various censuses for their own town or county and copies of these are available at their respective libraries. You could ask for lookups there or even ask for xeroxed copies of the pages with the names you want and you can get a lot of xeroxes for \$200. American. There is also a useful site with links to lots of other census sites at: www.census-online.com .

Another option that appeals to me is to have a group of researchers pool their money to buy the subscription .In this way the group could actually buy several different subscriptions and each person would do the lookups in one of them.

In all fairness, I should point out that several of my colleagues do have subscriptions to various internet genealogical services and most are quite happy with them.