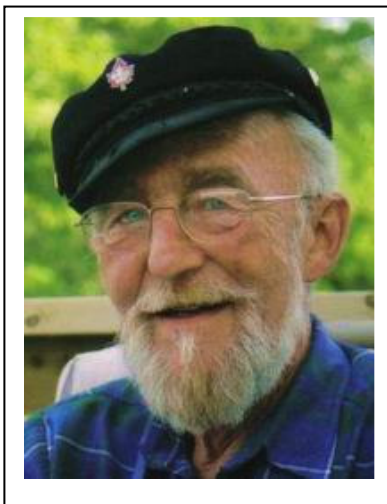


The Family Historian

Patrick Wohler

Column #28

Deliberate Date Confusion



Occasionally we run into date conflicts when the figures are just one or two days apart. I have traced some of these to confusing the date of baptism for the date of birth but we have a deliberate one with my wife's grandmother.

She was born on March 17th but her father had a strong antipathy to the Irish and registered her as born on March 16th. I wonder how many deliberate falsifications have been made in order to avoid an unwanted date or to use a preferred one. I am now sometimes a little suspicious if someone was born in the U.S. on July 4th.

More recently I saw a report of deliberate falsification because a child was born on Friday the 13th. The notion that this is an unlucky day apparently stems from the fact that on Friday 13 October, 1307, Philip IV of France ordered all the Knights Templar in the kingdom to be arrested and their property

sequestered. So if you find a date conflict involving a famous date, you may have a case of deliberate change.

The Silver Lining

I recently had a great experience that I'd love to share with you. All the contents of our basement, including the bulk of our library, was packed and stored while emergency crews tore down and rebuilt our foundation walls. After moving back into the house, after six months, we were faced with the job of unpacking, sorting, and placing the contents of six zillion large cartons.

I was into the fourth carton and found some material that, although 'valuable', no longer responded to any conceivable need. As I pulled it out to earmark for the dumpster, I noticed a few brown manila envelopes mixed in with it. I pulled them out, noted that they had notes on them from my father who had died in 1984, and piled them on my desk to look at later.

I had never seen these before. They must have been mixed in with other material when we cleared out my father's house.

The next morning, after checking my e-mail for notes from you, I casually opened the top envelope. It was 'Eureka' time. Inside were dated and identified photographs of my father's German family, correspondence going back to the late 19th century, and to cap it all off, certified transcripts of vital events for his direct ancestors going back four generations. Almost all of this information was completely new to me.

I was so excited that I had to replace it all in the envelope, do some deep breathing, and take a break. There was no way that I could do anything with that material yet.

The following morning, still a little stunned at my good fortune, I realized that there were more envelopes. They were full of photos and information on my mother's Irish family. It even included my grandmother's collection of family obituaries. There were business cards from relatives telling me what they did and where they lived. There was even a note on a scrap of paper with the burial plot number in a New York City cemetery for a close relative about whom I had virtually no information.

It will take me weeks to process all these goodies and the whole time I will be blessing my father's foresight in saving all this for me, even though it took me twenty years to find it.

If you have a Family History story that you would like to share, please drop me a line.