

A headstone can tell some tales

By Medicine Hat News on March 5, 2016.

We've often heard it been said that dead men tell no tales. But as genealogists know, their tombstones do. In other words, you traced the vital events of your forebear's lives, but have you researched their death? Have you researched the cemetery where your ancestor lies in peace, looked at their headstone, read the inscription to see if the information verifies with your documented research, or maybe it gives you more clues.

You've all heard the expression, "You can't believe all that you read." Well, that can be true of headstones as well. I will use my great grandparents' headstone as an example.

Now take my great grandfather Elias Lyons. After his death, eventually my great grandmother Mattie married a Mr. Fenn Jewell. When Mattie passed away she was buried next to my great grandfather Elias. Their headstone reads:

ELIAS W. Lyons. Died June 4, 1898, Aged 54 yrs. 5 Mos. 20 Ds. MATTIE LYONS Nee JEWELL 1852 — 1916

Elias and Mattie Lyons headstone in Pine Island, MN.

Ordinarily, genealogists are quite happy to get as much information as they can from the headstones to aid in their ancestral research. So tell me folks, what genealogical information can you glean from this headstone? Can you see any errors or anything out of the ordinary? No? Well let's take a look. As we look at Elias's information, it appears that all information is there, and is correct according to our research.

But, Mattie's inscription leaves much to be desired, according to our genealogical researched records. On a document or headstone the word "Nee" denotes the "maiden" name of the person. In this inscription Mattie's "maiden" name supposedly is "JEWELL." This is very wrong. On Elias and Mattie's "Wedding Certificate" it gives her "maiden" name as "ADAMS." Jewell was her second husband's surname.

And take note of the inscription on the stone. There is no mention of her birth or death date, only the year. But due to our research, we know her birth year is wrong.

In our research, we had obtained her birth certificate from the County of Oxford, England. This registered birth certificate states her birth date as 19 Nov 1848, and maiden name is ADAMS. Her death certificate from the State of Minnesota states her death date as 04 April 1916, and her birth year as 1852 (wrong). Hmmm, as I look further on the certificate of death, I notice that her second husband Fenn Jewell was listed as the informant. Thus, he gave the information about Mattie as he knew it.

This gives me a chuckle or two, as my great grandmother Mattie married a gentleman who was a few years younger than herself. I believe my Grannie Mattie fudged four years off her age, and has a story to tell.

This is a fine example of making sure that you have proof and sources to back up your genealogical research. Even though the headstone clearly states her maiden name as Jewell, it should be ADAMS, as well as the birth year should be 1848 not 1852. Sorry Gran, you've been busted, but we still love you!

Another interesting marker at this gravesite, closely in front of the headstone, is a metal rod with a bronze star at the top embedded in the ground. Inside the decorative star are the letters "G.A.R". These letters stand for the "Grand Army of the Republic," and signify that my great grandfather Elias Lyons was a Union Soldier in the American Civil War.

With the advent of Internet genealogical sites, you can be an armchair detective and discover the cemeteries and gravesites of your ancestors. Check out:

Find a Grave <http://www.findagrave.com> and Billion Graves <http://www.billiongraves.com> and others.

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