

Genealogy: When gathering family history, take great care

By Medicine Hat News on June 4, 2016.

As a reader of this genealogy column, you know that I have stressed the importance of adding family stories to your ancestor's life. Thus, you can learn who, why, when, where, and how they lived their lives, and what their life experiences were. Sometimes unexpectedly you come across the most interesting events, and experiences that affected your ancestor's lives. It is crucial they be documented, not only for your own reading pleasure, but as a record for future generations and historians. Not always will you find a wow! factor, but all of your research is important and should be documented.

Most of the ancestors on the paternal side of my family were agriculture labourers, some were masons, brick layers, etc., but on my maternal (mother) side of the family research, there was quite a diversity of occupations and professions. As an example, when doing my mother's family research I received many unexpected surprises. Not only did she have ancestors on the Mayflower voyage of 1620 that weathered hurricane force winds and eventually forced them to land at Plymouth, Mass., she also had ancestors connected to the 1607 Jamestown Colony Settlement in Virginia, which was the beginning of British North America. They were not immune to the wars, as many had fought in the Revolutionary, Civil, Indian, and both World Wars.

This information was not gathered overnight, but researched over many years. Searching one generation at a time, using family stories, census records, autobiographies, community history books, passenger and immigration records and military records. Also we made a few genealogy holidays to a number of destinations to uncover records, not available online or at genealogy centres. As you compile your research always be sure to note and record the source of your data. Common names and large families with same naming of their offspring can be a source of many errors. Please "be careful of merging online family trees," that "shaky leaf" you see inviting, and tempting you to add that information to your family tree. Maybe it is just thatÉ. a "shaky leaf." Sometimes it may work, but not always. The consequences of getting excited that the shaky leaf has added another generation to your family tree ... maybe that it really is not your family that is being added. Remember to check all members of the leaf as to the BMD (Birth, Marriage, Death) dates. Many names can be the same; the odd time so can birth dates. But if you know your own information is correct and have documented and sourced it, then you can make the right decision whether it is a match or not, to merge or not, whether it belongs to your family or not.

There is nothing worse than to be let astray and have to go back and make numerous corrections. So be wary when being tempted to "just" merge online trees. Sometimes it's a bonus, and sometimes it causes a bigger mountain to climb. In today's climate, the more accurately one can document the past the more likely it will survive through the ages.

In closing, as exciting as it may be to jump in and do online family research, it is critical to collect as many copies of documents/photos and record memories while these people and objects are still available. Remember that people do not live forever, that memories are fragile and can be forgotten, and that documents and photos may get destroyed or passed on to someone else so that you may never see them again.

Good luck in your research Next month, I will share an interesting story I discovered of my 10th great grandfather, who was shipwrecked on the uninhabited Island of Bermuda in 1609.

Lloyd Robinson is president of the Medicine Hat and District Genealogy Society. He may be contacted at timetraveller2011@gmail.com