

GENEALOGY POINTERS (04-24-07)

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"PROBING FOR FAMILY MEMORIES," by William Dollarhide

When questioning your relatives about your ancestry, you might get responses only in bits and pieces. Therefore, you need to keep going back to your family when a new bit of information has been learned, fill them in, and see if it jogs their memories for even more information. Oral historians devise questionnaires as a guide for interviewing people, and genealogists can do the same thing. Then, each unanswered question or incomplete answer should be followed up as more data is gathered. Here is an example from my own experience:

One of the great benefits I have enjoyed as a genealogist was to have my mother live with me for the last 15 years of her life. When I first became interested in genealogy, she was always there to remember names, stories, or to fill in details about our ancestry. She had a remarkable memory for people and could recite the names, places, and dates of a myriad of events in her life. She had a great memory for things her mother had told her, and she remembered her early experiences as a child, and her contacts with her relatives. All I had to do was ask a question about a certain time or place and her memory would kick in. To associate a particular event, she would say something like, "Oh, yes. That was when Jim was a baby," and with that, off she would go with the memories related to that time. With seven children born between 1930 and 1942, she had intuitively organized her memories by relating them to each child's birth date and childhood, so all I had to do to get a story about the time when the family lived in Corvallis, Oregon, was to relate it to "when David was a baby," and she was flooded with memories.

But one time I thought I had caught her cold. I had been on a trip to Edna, Kansas, where I had visited the grave site of mother's grandfather, Benjamin Watkins, who had died there in 1914. The cemetery sexton records indicated that the Watkins family plot consisted of six burial lots, but only two of them had interments. That is when I learned that the grave next to Benjamin's marker was in the same family plot, but it was for a name I had never seen before. It was a burial for a Marie McDaniel, who had died in 1976. The name meant nothing to me. I didn't have a clue as to who she was or how she might be related to Benjamin Watkins. After returning home, I asked mother about the name Marie McDaniel and whether it meant anything to her. She responded, "Of course, she was my cousin."

I couldn't believe it. I asked her, "Mom, why have you never mentioned that name to be

me before?" and Mom said, "You never asked me before." With the name Marie McDaniel recalled to her memory, mother proceeded to fill me in on her family, where they lived, her father's name (her mother's older brother), and more details I never knew before.

That day some bells went off in my head. Man! If you never ask the question, you'll never know the answer!

Interviewing Relatives for Genealogical Information:

I have had much more success interviewing family members by asking questions that relate to their own personal experiences, rather than asking them first for names, dates, and places. The human brain often stores information in unrelated bits and pieces, but usually related to events that took place in our past. For example, you may remember the time you fell off your bike, cut your knee, and had to go to the doctor and have stitches put in. With that memory, the associated names, dates, and places can be constructed. While interviewing a relative, and after learning of some event in a person's life, ask when that happened, where it took place, and who was there with them at the time. This is how a genealogist can get the names, dates, and places of genealogical events--by association.

A strong memory of a certain event, such as the day Pearl Harbor was attacked, JFK was assassinated, or some personal highlight in a person's life, will evoke associated memories from a person. These might include the place a person was living and working, the time of year, the street where the house was located, the people who lived next door, the doctor's office, the church they attended, and perhaps many other details. The key to evoking these genealogical bits and pieces is to identify the personal event.

So, now, when I ask questions of my relatives, I try to relate the queries to some event in their life. Here are a few sample questions. You can devise many more on your own. Note that the questions are aimed at locating a possible research source, such as a hospital, doctor's office, church, funeral home, cemetery, and so on.

Sample Questions, Relating to:

An illness:

- Were you ever in the hospital? Where was it? What was the problem?
- Who was your family doctor? Is he still in practice, or did another doctor take it over?

Going to church:

- Where did you go to church? Do you recall any events that took place there, such as marriages, baptisms, christenings, etc.? Is the church still there?
- Did you have relatives who went to the same church?

A funeral or burial:

- Did your family go to cemeteries on Memorial Day? Which cemeteries? Which

relatives were buried there?

- How about your grandfather's funeral, what do you remember about that day? Who ended up with the funeral guest book? What was the name of the funeral home? Where was it located?

Going to school:

- Where did you go to school? Is that school still there? Do you remember any school annuals in which your picture appeared? Did you have relatives that went to the same school?

Going to a nursing home:

- Were any of your relatives ever in a nursing home? Where was it? Do you think it is still in business today?

Going to weddings:

- Do you remember going to any of your relatives' weddings? Who were they? What was their relationship to you?

- Do you remember the people who came to your wedding? Was there a guest book that everyone signed?

Going into the Armed Services:

- Where were you living when you went in the Army? Navy? Marines? Where did you serve? Did you receive any awards? When were you discharged?

Going to work:

- Where was your first job? Is that company still in business? What did you do? How much were you paid? How long did you stay there? Do you remember when you signed up for a Social Security card? Where were you living at the time?

Remember, if you never ask a question, you'll never get an answer! Good luck in your questions and answers!

N.B. Readers will find an excellent selection of "probing questions" in our publication, *YOUR LIFE & TIMES*, by Stephen and Julia Arthur. Using this oral history handbook as a guide, you'll be able to record your life experiences on tape simply by answering questions that will lead you, step by step, through the precious moments of your life.

Was \$8.95 Now \$5.50

http://www.genealogical.com/index.php?main_page=product_info&item_number=180

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FEATURED APRIL CD Consolidates Hundreds of Thousands of Union Army Death Records

Between 1865 and 1871, the Quartermaster's Department released the identities of the 200,000 dead soldiers whose whereabouts it had certified in a 27-volume series of

publications entitled, with some variations, "Roll of Honor: Names of Soldiers Who Died in Defense of the American Union, Interred in the National Cemeteries." The twofold purpose of the publication was (1) to memorialize "those heroes who have given up their lives upon the altar of their country, in defense of the American Union;" and (2) "to help friends, relatives, and surviving comrades locate the soldiers' final resting place." The "Roll of Honor" in and of itself is evidence of the government's extraordinary attempt to identify and transfer the remains of its war dead.

In 1994, GPC consolidated the 27 volumes of the "Roll of Honor" into 10 hardcover books. GPC subsequently added an every-name index volume prepared by Martha and Bill Reamy and a supplementary book, "The Unpublished Roll of Honor," compiled by Mark Hughes.

The "Roll of Honor" reprint was an important contribution to Civil War and genealogical literature for several reasons. Prior to the reprint, researchers could find a complete set of the "Roll of Honor" in only a few libraries outside of the Library of Congress. Nor was it easy to use when it could be found. The volumes were published as battlefield sites were surveyed, graves exhumed, and bodies reburied--state-by-state and cemetery-by-cemetery. The work as a whole lacked a name index. Some of the volumes indicated a soldier's former place of burial, while others did not. Given the genealogical uses of the "Roll of Honor" (it provides, generally, the soldier's name, rank, regiment, company, and date of death), the reprint edition was of enormous importance in pulling all the information together and making it available in libraries throughout the U.S.--at a price of about \$500.00.

Today, the ROLL OF HONOR: Civil War Union Soldiers, our CD-ROM version of the series, places the contents of the original 27 volumes within the financial reach of the individual researcher. The CD contains images of the pages of each volume in the series, as well as "The Unpublished Roll of Honor." The researcher can access any one of these pages via the CD's search engine, which features an every-name index. If your research places you on the trail of a fallen Union Army soldier, the ROLL OF HONOR is the most comprehensive, expedient, and inexpensive (it has been dropped in price from \$49.99 to \$29.99) source of information on Union Civil War fatalities.

http://www.genealogical.com/index.php?main_page=product_info&item_number=7351

The other four CDs we are highlighting at www.genealogical.com are excellent values, too. Whether you are hunting for New York military records, Louisiana, or Virginia ancestors (especially the counties of Southside Virginia), you can't go wrong with any of these products.

VIRGINIA GENEALOGIES AND BIOGRAPHIES

This two-disc CD set identifies some 310,000 individuals in meticulously crafted studies that span as many as three centuries. Until now, this body of material was totally beyond the reach of the ordinary researcher, available only at a handful of public and university

libraries. Drawing liberally on private letters, diaries, and manuscripts, as well as church records, vital records, court records, wills and administrations, books, newspapers, and personal reminiscences, this is one of the best-documented collections of Virginia genealogies and biographies ever assembled.

http://www.genealogical.com/index.php?main_page=product_info&item_number=7550

GENEALOGIES OF KENTUCKY FAMILIES

The principal genealogy periodicals for the Bluegrass State were "The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society" and "The Filson Club History Quarterly." In 1981, GPC published the genealogies from both of these distinguished Kentucky periodicals--some 200 in all--in a three-volume, 2,500-page set referencing 50,000 Kentucky ancestors. These three volumes of Kentucky genealogies are now available in an electronic format. At one-fifth the cost of the original volumes, this CD is an extraordinary value you won't want to pass up.

http://www.genealogical.com/index.php?main_page=product_info&item_number=7185

EARLY LOUISIANA SETTLERS

This Family Archive CD covers some of the most difficult records to find in all of American genealogy, including family histories, early census, military, marriage, and immigration records, and more. Approximately 60,000 Louisiana settlers of the 1700s and early 1800s are identified, including many people of French and German extraction, as well as a mixture of Spanish, English, and Scotch-Irish ancestry.

http://www.genealogical.com/index.php?main_page=product_info&item_number=7525

SOUTHSIDE VIRGINIA GENEALOGIES

This CD is a compilation of 400 family histories, each of which, typically, extends back to the colonial period in Southside Virginia, the area of Virginia south of the James River, east of the Blue Ridge Mountains, and north of the North Carolina border. Altogether, SOUTHSIDE VIRGINIA GENEALOGIES contains more than 67,000 citations, including references to about 10,000 marriages, 9,000 wills, 10,000 deeds, 3,800 land patents and grants, and 5,000 census reports, with notes on more than 1,000 members of the Virginia legislature, 230 members of Congress, and hundreds of veterans of the Revolution and the Civil War.

http://www.genealogical.com/index.php?main_page=product_info&item_number=7540

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UNSURPASSED TOOL for German Research

If you find a ship's passenger record for a German ancestor, will you automatically know where to look for your ancestor's records in Germany? If you can't find the passenger record, does this mean that you will never learn where your German ancestor came from?

According to the authors of the book, *ANCESTORS IN GERMAN ARCHIVES: A Guide to Family History Sources*, by Raymond S. Wright III, Nathan S. Rives, Mirjam J. Kirkham, and Saskia Schier Bunting, the answer to both of these questions is "No!" To learn why, please read on.

First, some background: the German Territories and later the German Empire provided more emigrants to America than any other European national group. When they came to America, German immigrants left behind a trail of records familiar to everyone in genealogy--from births, marriages, and deaths to citizenship and census records, and from land and tax records to emigration records. The key to German genealogical research, of course, is to find out where these records are located, but since there are more than 2,000 national, state, and local repositories in Germany, to say nothing of church repositories and other private archives, such an undertaking is daunting if not downright impossible. We know there are records, but what good are they if we can't find them? And these records stretch back to the Middle Ages, encompassing family history sources so vast in number and so scattered that the mind reels.

To overcome this challenge, in 1996 Brigham Young University (BYU) launched its German Immigrant Ancestors project. The principal mission of this undertaking was to identify the records of German emigrants and to create Internet-accessible databases describing emigrants' birthplaces, occupations, spouses, and children. (Researchers can learn the details of this project at <http://immigrants.byu.edu>.) *ANCESTORS IN GERMAN ARCHIVES* is the direct outgrowth of that ambitious project.

Under the supervision of Professor Raymond Wright, BYU mailed questionnaires to approximately 2,000 national, state, and local German government archives, as well as private archives. The questionnaires asked archivists to identify their archives' jurisdictions and to describe the records housed in their collections and the services provided by their staff. The questionnaires asked specifically for information about each archive's collections of vital records, religious records, military records, emigration records, passport records, censuses, and town and county records. Archivists were also asked to describe any published guides or inventories to their collections. The returned questionnaires, supplemented by Internet searches, were used to create summaries of each archive's jurisdictions, holdings, and services.

The result of this massive survey is an exhaustive guide to family history sources in German archives at every level of jurisdiction, public and private. Anyone searching for data about people who lived in Germany in the past need only determine which archives today have jurisdiction over the records that were created by church or state institutions. The Locality Index, moreover, makes this task even easier because it identifies every town with an archive, no matter what kind. For a more detailed description of the scope, contents, and arrangement of this outstanding volume, please use the URL at the end of this article.

To return to the questions posed above, if you find a passenger record that states when and from where in Germany your ancestor came, you still have to figure out what

German state, city, parish, or other repository has control of his/her records. If you cannot find a passenger record but have a rough idea of your German ancestor's origins (e.g., from Heidelberg after the U.S. Civil War), you may be able to skip over the missing passenger list and go directly to German vital records for your ancestor. Whatever the case, ANCESTORS IN GERMAN ARCHIVES will make your task far easier than ever before. Why? Because it is a one-stop guide to genealogical sources in Germany, and, most importantly, it answers the fundamental questions about the very existence of genealogical records in Germany and paves the way for successful research.

http://www.genealogical.com/index.php?main_page=product_info&item_number=6505

Of Related Interest:

MEYERS ORTS- und Verkehrs-Lexikon des Deutschen Reichs

Almost all serious German research begins with MEYERS ORTS- und Verkehrs-Lexikon des Deutschen Reichs, the massive gazetteer that describes approximately 210,000 cities, towns, hamlets, and dwelling places in the German Empire prior to World War I. The millions of facts presented about these localities represent an entire library of reference works and enable the researcher to determine the whereabouts of civil, religious, court, and military records. This reprint of the last great edition of 1912-1913, in German, contains a new "Researcher's Guide" and translations of the original Introduction and Instruction for the Use of the Gazetteer by Professor Raymond S. Wright III, rendering the great MEYERS ORTS- und Verkehrs-Lexikon accessible to the average researcher. In addition, this reprint edition includes a third volume consisting of the often omitted Appendix to Volume II and the scarce Supplement of September 1913.

http://www.genealogical.com/index.php?main_page=product_info&item_number=6504

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