



# SCSH GENEALOGY CLUB



## 2023 View Articles

These articles were written by our member, Ron Gilmore, and published in 2023 in the View, Sun City Shadow Hills' monthly publication. They show the variety of issues that might arise doing research as well as some examples of the resources that are out there for you to use.

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## Genealogy 101

Several articles explained the challenges and the victories associated with Genealogy -

### **Genealogy – Everyone is Doing It**

More and more folks are joining the challenge of tracking their family history. Ancestry.com alone has a database of millions of subscribers and many more millions of online records. There are many other large data suppliers. Archive organizations are digitizing millions of records every month. For many, the science of DNA has become a vital source of learning family history through painstaking research and discovery.

Genealogy often does provides some surprises, even those that can be difficult to face. How about the woman that found that the man she thought was her father was not? And then, the young men and women who were able to reconnect with biological family members that they had not known existed before?

Cemeteries around the world can provide details of the final resting place of ancestors but what about their lives? Their community? Their interests and vocation? Did they own land? Were they famous? Were they infamous? Wouldn't you like to know?

### **Why Genealogy?**

We seem to have a hunger to know where we come from. Who were our ancestors? Were we related to royalty or pirates? What is my ethnicity? French? Danish? Croatian? Was I adopted? So many questions lay unanswered.

Well, genealogy, the tracing of family lines of descent, can be a fun and fascinating hobby. A growing hobby in North America, genealogy queries generate millions of Google searches daily. Loads of Facebook groups are dedicated to genealogy. YouTube videos abound. Who knows, the Internet might just become your new best friend.

New technology tools abound but your best help might be from folks with similar interests. The demographic of the genealogical community suggests they have a common interest and a strong willingness to share and help others. Loads of courses are available at all levels both in person and online. There are books galore, blogs, course videos, and helpful mentors.

Start with what you know and launch a new career as a family history detective, uncovering the stories, legends, heroes, and skeletons of your family.

## Organizing Yourself as a Genealogist

Once you fall into the fascinating world of genealogy, you find yourself collecting “stuff.” All manner of stuff! You need to organize this material so that, when needed, you can find an item without scouring through the entire collection. Thankfully, there is help -

First, create a separate filing storage area for each of your four primary families:

- Father
- Mother
- Spouse’s father
- Spouse’s mother

This is true for real artifacts (pieces of paper) and digital artifacts (computer files).

Second, within each storage area, we suggest that you have separate folders for the following categories:

- Birth and Baptism certificates
- Death certificates
- Marriage certificates
- Education records
- Military records
- Health records
- Burial records
- Emigration/Immigration records
- Census records
- Wills, Probate records
- List of artifacts
- Photos
- Residences
- Correspondence

If the content grows too large, you may separate these by calendar year. You now have a place for everything, and your searching challenges are now manageable. You are welcome.

## Handling Family Treasures

### Old Letters in a Shoebox

Yup, it was actually a shoebox of old letters that my dear Aunt Gertie passed to me during a short summer visit. It took me some time to open the box and review the contents but when I did, I found some 60 or so letters from the WWI era. Wow!

Most of the letters were written by my grandfather, Thomas McCracken Gilmore, to his wife, Agnes. I found only one letter from Agnes to Thomas.

Thomas, at the time, was in the trenches of Northern France and Belgium with a machine gun battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, fighting the Germans. Agnes, my grandmother, was back in northern Saskatchewan, on a somewhat primitive homestead, raising their four small children.

Thomas fought in the famous battles of Vimy Ridge and Passchendaele and was gassed three times. He returned to Canada at the end of the war, but sadly, the returning soldiers brought with them the dreaded "Swine Flu." My grandmother died within weeks of his return.

### Old Letters in a Suitcase

When my mother passed, my younger brother, Tom, inherited the task of cleaning out her town house and settling her estate. Sometime long after the funeral, Tom visited us and left an old suitcase that once belonged to our mother.

I eventually opened the suitcase to find a large bundle of letters, all neatly bound with a faded pink ribbon. All had been written during WWII by my Mother, Betty, to my Dad, Watson. Watson was stationed overseas with the Canadian Army while my Mom spent the war working in a grocery store and raising my older brother and me.

In a small mining town, there was not much in the way of exciting news, so Betty writes about her two boys, their daily activities, fights, adventures, and achievements. I hastened to transcribe all these letters for the rest of our family, explaining the many references to friends, family, neighbors, and locations as best I could. I also included the war timeline.

While no letters from Watson to Betty survived, our family now had the most amazing insights into our early wartime lives.

## Heirlooms

We all have them. Maybe it is a military service medal, a precious China teacup that once belonged to Aunt Martha, or that WWI German bayonet. In my family, we have a host of “treasures” accumulated over a lifetime. My grandfather’s Orange Order ceremonial sash (below) is interesting with the host of embroidered icons. My son has a collection of carbide lamps that my father gave him from his time working underground in a copper mine. And many more items.



What to do with all of this “stuff”? Someday, we will no longer be around to look after these items. What then? Well, at first cut, try the following:

1. Create a document describing each item (with a photo), and the provenance (i.e., where it came from).
2. Ask your children, siblings, nieces, and nephews if they have an interest in any item.
3. Check your local museum or historical society to assess any potential interest.
4. Share your inventory list with family.

In many cases, you might find a good home for that treasure.

## Genealogy with a Twist

### Chicago Millionaire Saga

He was a true loner. He lived alone in a tiny bungalow in a remote suburb of Chicago. He did not appear to have any friends. Each day, he trudged off to work and returned later in the day to disappear inside his home.

This pattern never changed until the day he died. Municipal officials soon descended upon the little house. Neighbors eventually learned a bit about the strange old man. He was an immigrant from Eastern Europe who had worked as a school custodian. And,

he had saved an amazing amount of money during his bleak, lonely life. His bank account totaled nearly \$11 million.

An estate agency soon took on the challenge of finding potential family members. After two years of genealogical research, the agency found over 100 relatives in Europe who would share in the estate. These folks would inherit the \$11 million, less the estate agency fees. Who knew?

## **Name Changes**

People's names change all the time. One common myth is that immigrants arriving at Ellis Island in New York had their names changed by some uncaring immigration agent simply because of language barriers. And, hence, the family genealogist is forever cursed trying to untangle the mess of records with different spellings of the family surname.

Well, there are lots of reasons that folks change their names, and the Ellis Island myth is exactly that – a myth. So why do folks change their names?

- They may not like their birth name. Sometimes parents choose names that defy logic or common sense.
- Many started using a first name that helped them fit in with their new communities (“Giovanna” became “Jennie;” “Ching Wa” became “Mary”)
- They are trying to create a new identity. Maybe the immigrant father left a wife and family in the old country to marry again in America. Maybe the person was trying to evade a criminal past.

In the case of many Germans in North America, after WWI, it was not popular to have a German surname so a change could help. WWII may have been worse in terms of national prejudice for jobs and opportunities. This was true of other nationalities as well.

For the genealogist, tracking name changes over time is merely part of the job. Enjoy!

## **Endogamy and Genealogy**

What a great word! And it rhymes with “bigamy” and “polygamy.”

Broadly defined, endogamy is the practice of marrying within a specific social group, religious denomination, caste, or ethnic group. Endogamy is common in many cultures and ethnic groups around the world. Endogamy may result in transmission of genetic disorders within the relatively closed community.

Endogamic marriage patterns may increase the frequency of cousin marriages in a population, and may cause high probability of children of first, second, third cousins,

etc. In DNA, endogamy commonly refers to any cousin marriage that affects a family tree. And we know that cousin marriages do occur so, be on the lookout.

If cousin marriage has occurred in a family tree it is referred to as pedigree collapse. It creates stronger DNA matches (i.e., a higher centimorgan count) between the DNA matches than otherwise might be expected. Your investigation might confuse a second cousin with a third cousin for example, simply because the centimorgan level is higher.

And you thought you knew the relative values of centimorgans for various levels of cousins. Researcher - beware of the potential for endogamy impact. It just might explain some otherwise confusing numbers.

## Travelers in Ireland

The ancient Irish referred to these folks as “*The walking people*,” meaning that they were perpetually on the move from place to place, providing seasonal labor or selling crafts, horses, and dogs. These folks had their own culture, language, and practices. They were often maligned as thieves.

In more recent times they were called *Gypsies* or *Romani*, but these appellations were incorrect despite the fact they then traveled in barrel-shaped horse drawn wagons. In fact, the Travelers were native to the Emerald Isle and managed to survive through Ireland’s extremely turbulent past.

Today, they are referred to as *Travelers*. They still are on the move but now, they travel in small caravans with modern camping trailers. They are still stigmatized and prefer to isolate among their own.

The Travelers have their own unique DNA groupings which prove they are of Irish aboriginal descent. Irish Travelers speak English and sometimes one of two dialects of Shelta, their unique language.