

Genealogy Basics – GotGenealogy.com’s 10 Golden Rules

By Joe Petrie

I am a founding member of the Friends of Irish Research (FIR) an affiliate of CBGHA. One of the many free services that FIR offers is an introductory seminar, a PowerPoint presentation with hand-outs. The PowerPoint Seminar is available on the FIR web site, www.friendsofirishresearch.org in the School of Irish Genealogy tab. It is offered to individuals and groups who want to know: how to start; what information to collect; where to find information; and when to conduct genealogy research.

The introductory seminar includes **GotGenealogy.com’s 10 Golden Rules of Genealogy**. Why? By following the 10 Golden Rules consistently good genealogy results! The Rules are:

1. “SPELING DUSN’T COWNT”

Back in the day folks couldn’t spell and many could barely write, so check all variant spellings of names. Whenever possible, use wild card or Soundex searches to help find variant spellings of your names.”

2. ASSUME NOTHING

Check all your facts, don’t assume that any particular document is right or wrong, and always try to find other independent sources to corroborate your facts as much as possible. Verify, verify, verify. For instance, don’t assume that

- your ancestors were married
- census information is accurate
- vital (or other) records were correct
- your ancestor’s life events were recorded
- your ancestors were enslaved
- newly freed slaves in the same vicinity with the same surname were related”

3. USE DISCRETION

Never lie in your genealogy reports, but use discretion when reporting family information, as it may affect some of your living relatives.”

4. ALWAYS DOCUMENT YOUR SOURCES, NO MATTER HOW MUCH THEY CONTRADICT ONE ANOTHER

Over time, you will compile more data and those once seemingly contradictory pieces of evidence may prove to be just the pieces of the puzzle you need to prove or disprove your theory. But be consistent as you cite your sources. There are all sorts of standard citation formats that you can follow, but even if you just make up your own form for listing your sources, be consistent with it. Future researchers (your descendants) will thank you.”

5. MOST DATES ARE APPROXIMATE

Prior to the 20th century, anyway. It’s okay to state that someone was born “abt. 1845” or died “May 1915” if you don’t have an exact date. And even if you have an exact date from one document, another document may have a different date. And which date is “correct?” They all are.”

6. IF UNSURE, SAY SO

Future researchers will thank you for being honest if you simply say that you cannot prove a specific fact, yet you “suspect” such and such is true. Don’t fudge the facts. Ever.”

7. YOU CANNOT DO IT ALL ONLINE

Yes, we love doing our research online and we think that there’s nothing better than using the computer to find new sources, view digital images of original documents and even connect with long lost relatives. But, for genealogists, the internet will never replace the wonderful work of libraries, county courthouses, archives, and historical societies. You can’t do it all online. Do as much as you can online, then turn off your computer and hit the bricks!”

8. JUST BECAUSE IT’S ONLINE DOESN’T MEAN IT’S TRUE

The internet is a wonderful thing but it’s filled with oodles of bad information. Don’t make the mistake of believing anything you find online at face value. Verify against other sources of information, even if you paid for the information.”

9. PASS YOUR RESEARCH ALONG

No matter how many decades you spend researching your family, your research will never be done. In that stead, plan on passing along your research to the next generation’s researchers. Leave excellent notes, cite all your sources, explain your shorthand ... in essence, leave your research the way you’d have liked to have found it.”

10. DON’T DIE WITH YOUR STORIES STILL IN YOU

Giving credit to Dr. Wayne Dyer for his Don’t die with your music still in you, we want to remind you to tell the stories as completely and as accurately as possible. Genealogy isn’t about just doing research. Genealogy is about telling the stories and ensuring that your ancestor’s legacies live on for generations to come. Without the stories, the research won’t do anyone much good. The legacy of your ancestors rests in your capable hands. Doing the research is fine, but always remember that you have been chosen to tell their stories.”

In the future there will be other documents on genealogy basics, I'll cover forms, free genealogy software, tutorials including videos, citations and attribution, copying and pasting from internet sources, personal preferences etc.

#

Your comments and suggestions are important to me. My address is: joe-apg@norwoodlight.com

Joseph F. Petrie

Founding Member, Friends of Irish Research (FIR)

Member, Cape Breton Genealogy and Historical Association (CBGHA)

Member, Family History Society of Newfoundland and Labrador (FHSNL)

Member, New England Historic Genealogical Society (NEHGS)

Member, Association of Professional Genealogists (APG)