

From the Desk of the President

Fall is well upon us, a great time to finish outside chores and start afresh on our family history while the days shorten, the rains drum outside and long evenings invite us to dig into and record the past. Momentous as an earthquake, I “coincidentally” found a door though that “brick wall” in my surname research after more than 30 years of effort!



I had already planned a family history trip to the Canadian Maritime provinces to spend time pouring through musty archives with perhaps little or no results beyond the feeling that I had tried, and gathering pictures of the area for a family history in progress while exploring towns dotting the glacier scraped granite coves and headlands of the Atlantic. I joined a historical society on the little Cape Breton island where this ancestor reportedly had been born; my computer files and maps were gathered and ready for travel. Answering a prompting to again search records I had searched unknown numbers of times previously, I spent long hours with newly expanded, on-line archives and, unwilling to go to bed, finally thrilled to see the beautiful cursive names of this long-sought family in the census image with 8 other siblings as well. Found on an even tinier island with no infrastructure even today beyond wharfs, docks and a handful of tiny houses, Google maps showed this small granite rock to be a short distance across a channel from the Canadian island listed as his birthplace on Peter DeYoung's Massachusetts marriage certificate. Changed from the current spelling of my surname, a thick Arcadian accent must have caused an English speaking immigrations worker to record his name as it has been for the ensuing 4 generations in the US. After many hours of silent computer searching, my dog startled awake, staggered to my side and anxiously studied my face, those eyes and expressive brows saying ***“You OK.....what's all that hollering about?!”*** I reassured and patted him for a bit and off he walked, flopped down and harrumphed, again unsure about his housemate's odd behavior. Poor dog.....

So, what have I learned, after waiting more than 3 decades? Many organizations collectively add many millions of genealogical records on-line every week; some of these ***are*** yours and mine. If we haven't checked a familiar source in a while, check again for records are added in staggering numbers; many sources previously only available by going to the archive are often now available online. Convenient for us, digital records are widely seen as a solution to warehousing paper and placing these online reduces the space and cost of retrieving and copying records for genealogists; their cost savings cause many new archives and other sources of information to be made available, often free and at an accelerating rate.

As a result of that one census image, the story of my family is lengthened, broadened and filled to a greater depth with the story of fishermen, seamen and the fascinating history of the Arcadian people, the descendants of the 17th century French colonists who intermarried with the native M'kMaq peoples whose history is rich in its own right. Fascinating as well is when our generations-long oral traditions are corroborated in documents giving flesh and detail to the sparse bones of our family's story.

I have come to listen to those “nudges” to look again, to look elsewhere; have you had an inkling to look again as well? I have many reasons to believe this “coincidence” wasn't a coincidence; many of you have expressed such occasions in your own research as well. What new sources are now available to you ***today?*** See you at the next general meeting in November.....I'll be the guy that just returned from the Canadian Atlantic, an excited look on his face, anxious to plow into new directions, the fruits of the trip and my latest, “coincidental” impression!