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Volume 3 Fall 2004

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Journal Submissions

The *BYU Family Historian* is an online academic journal published by the Center for Family History and Genealogy at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. Visit our Web site at <http://familyhistory.byu.edu>.

We would like to invite you to submit an article, book review, or CD-ROM review for this publication. We publish articles relating to family and local history, research techniques and procedures, descriptions of genealogical and historical records and collections of international scope, documented compiled genealogies, professionalism, and reviews.

We solicit articles on beginning genealogy as well as scholarly articles. Articles should include footnotes and be well documented. They will be peer reviewed. We follow *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th edition (Chicago, 2003).

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GRANDMOTHER'S MISSED TRAIN TRIP

Walter C. Meyer, AG®

There is a parlor game where one person, without letting others in the room hear, whispers a message to the person seated next. This person then relays the message quietly to the next person and so on until it has gone around the room. The messages as originally sent and as finally communicated receive comparison - often with much hilarity when large discrepancies exist. Are family history stories immune or does the same thing happen to those passed down from one generation to another over sometimes lengthy periods of time?

A rather spectacularly ending story in my own family history piqued my imagination. The story about my grandmother, Josephine Weinmann (1864 - 1926), involves a Swiss train accident. Between the time my grandmother turned twenty (1884) and prior to her marriage (1893) she was to take a train from Rorschach in the northeast of Switzerland, to Basel in the northwest. To reach the train from their home in Goldach, a village near Rorschach, my great grandfather transported her in a horse drawn buggy. As they were going down a hill, they noticed a wagon wheel roll past them, which of course made them curious about its origin. The story, from my father's life story written in 1965 -

"Grandfather Weinmann had to slow down in order not to drive over that wheel and as the speed of the buggy was reduced the buggy lowered itself on one side on the rear and both Josephine and her father realized that it was their own buggy wheel that had passed them. Grandfather, being a rather stout person, along with the momentum of the buggy kept it upright while in motion and their predicament became obvious only at reduced speed."

"After replacing the wheel, and having had to walk up the hill to find the nut to fasten the wheel, they continued to the station

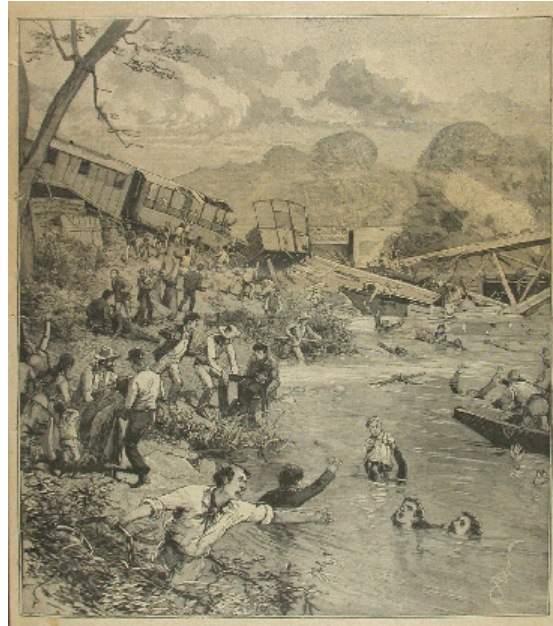


Figure 1 Lithograph from the front page of *Le Petit Parisien*, June 28, 1891 dramatically showing the rescue.

in Rorschach to see the train leave just as they arrived. That train broke through the bridge crossing the river Aare and not one person, passenger or crew, survived the disaster."¹

Now the idea of a stout person balancing the side of a buggy is rather cute, but knowing my great grandfather was large enough to do so is perhaps discouraging. Surely everybody is familiar with arriving late at something - that is not significant, but a train accident in which "not one person" survived is spectacularly significant.

Was there a Swiss train accident that killed so many people? Such a major disaster must have historical references. An earlier life story (1931), wrote, "the train broke through the bridge near Brugg (Canton Aargau)." What aspects of the story were factual and what parts embellished? Over the 60 to 75 year period, it is quite possible, or even probable that alterations had taken place.

The story did not relate the exact location and time of the accident. In addition, it did not state whether grandmother was going to the city of Basel, to Basel-Land (the surrounding area) or whether Basel was just a transfer point to another place. It did not state



Figure 2 View of the Münchenstein disaster from the village side of the Birs River looking north towards Basel.

whether her ticket would have placed her on the accident train or whether she might have been on the train and it did not say whether she took a later train. If the story were indeed true, where and when did the accident occur? Where to, and for what purpose was the trip?

Pertinent items of the story would need to match the historical facts to show that it were true. These are:

1. Significance: A disastrous or major train accident;
2. Time: Before her marriage in February 1893 (1884 to 1893);
3. Area: In the northernmost part of Switzerland
4. Location: A bridge from which a train can fall into a river (preferably the Aare River);
5. Cities: Related to Basel or Brugg in some way
6. Casualties: Multiple passengers and crew killed

In checking books dealing with world

catastrophes, some containing reports about major train accidents, there was nothing resembling such a disaster so the next step was to write to Switzerland. Correspondence ensued, relating the story and requesting information, to several different places in Switzerland:

Die Schweizerische Bundesbahnen (SBB), the Swiss National Railways in Zürich,

Tages-Anzeiger, a daily newspaper in Zürich,

Brugg Rathaus - the city hall in Brugg,

Brugg Bibliothek - Brugg public library,

Historical Department of the Swiss Government in Bern

Other places in Switzerland received redirected letters, but my letters rewarded four responses:

SBB in Zürich, SBB in Bern, Stadtbibliothek (City library) in Brugg and Stadtarchiv (City Archives) in Zürich.

Subsequently correspondence began with additional SBB offices and e-mail correspondence occurred with the Staatsarchiv (State Archives) of Baselland in Liestal, BL, Switzerland.

Information coming from the Switzerland responses:

A) A five-volume work entitled *One Hundred Years of Swiss Railways*, published in 1947. The Swiss Railway system started less than 20 years before my grandmother was born in 1864. When grandmother was young, the system was also still young.

B) The Stadtarchiv Zürich and the SBB headquarters in Bern were very helpful and included in their responses photocopies of several pages of articles, some photographs and a list of all the significant train accidents during the hundred years (1847-1947).

C) Railway schedules from that periodⁱⁱ indicate that some trains stopped briefly in Zürich then proceeded on to Basel but most required a transfer in Zürich. If the missed train traveled through to Basel, an accident involving that train could have happened anywhere between Rorschach and Basel. If on the other hand there was a transfer at Zürich, an accident with that train must have occurred between Rorschach and Zürich. A second or even a third transfer could be possible on the trip, as long as grandmother's schedule from the first train would have placed her on the train of the accident. If she had changed trains in Basel, the accident train must have been going away from, not toward Basel.

D) The list of railway accidents in Switzerland indicates only four during the specified period 1884 to 1893.ⁱⁱⁱ

1. 8 Jan 1885 at Seebach, in which one person was injured.
2. 20 Oct 1885 near Arth on the Rigi-Bahn in which the conductor was killed and 9 people seriously or slightly injured.

3. 17 Aug 1891 at Zollikofen with 18 killed and 118 injured.

4. 14 Jun 1891 at Münchenstein in which two engines and several cars went through a bridge killing 71 people and injuring 171.

There were no train accidents on the list either at or near Brugg, involved with the Aare River, or on the line between Rorschach and Zürich.

An examination of each of the four accidents fitting the time requirement reveals that:

1. Seebach is a suburb on the north of Zürich. It fits the geographic requirement, but a solitary injury does not expand into "all passengers and crew killed."

2. The Rigi-Bahn is a railway going to the top of Rigi Mountain near Luzern in the central part of Switzerland. This is too far south to fit the geographic requirement. As well, trip up the mountain would be a side trip, not part of a journey 'to Basel.' One death and nine injuries do not equal 'no survivors.'

3. Zollikofen is quite close to Bern, the capital city of Switzerland. This also is too far south to fit the geographic requirement and is not part of the route from Rorschach to Basel. Eighteen dead and 118 injured is a significant number but this also does not seem to relate to 'no survivors.'

In none of the above did trains fall into a river nor have a bridge collapse. It would appear that the above three accidents do not match the story. However, the fourth is noteworthy. The information received about this accident included: 1) a two-page article from the 100 year history; 2) a six page newspaper article (including photographs) dated 20 Jun 1891; 3) a nine page article; 4) some photographs and a report from a more recent book, "The Swiss Railway Saga - 150 years of Swiss Trains;" 5) photographs and lithographs of the accident from the Baselland Staatsarchiv; and 6) railway schedule pages from June 1891. The accident attracted much attention both at the time and in historical retrospect.

4. Münchenstein is a small village about five kilometers south of the city of Basel on the rail line to the Jura and on to Bern in the central part of the country, however it is not on the line from Zürich to Basel. The railway crossed the river Birs on a 42-meter iron bridge^{iv} about 500 meters north of the village. A regional music festival scheduled in Münchenstein for that day attracted many visitors. Because of the increase in passengers, the Jura Simplon Railway added a second engine and two carriages to this train. Three additional trains ran earlier.

The train, carrying 500 to 600 people, with its two locomotives and twelve cars arrived at the bridge close to 2:30 on that fateful Sunday afternoon, June 14, 1891.

The bridge collapsed after the first locomotive had just about finished crossing, dropping the two engines and five cars into the river. Thanks to the automatic ‘Westinghouse-brake,’^v the last five 3rd class cars carrying about 300 passengers remained on the embankment but unfortunately, the destruction of the 1st and 2nd class passenger cars following the engines resulted in most of the fatalities. The next two cars were baggage cars, which if they had been passenger cars, would have greatly increased the mortality and injury rate.

Observers of the accident reported different things.^{vi} One said the girders collapsed somewhere in the middle of the bridge just behind the second engine. Others saw the first carriage derail. Observers suggested a “tragic lack of coordination” between the two drivers because as the first engine entered the bridge it braked while the second appeared to accelerate causing a derailment. It is possible that the ensuing misbalance of the weight caused one side of the bridge to collapse with its catastrophic results.

The accident of course was news worthy locally and nationally but also internationally.^{vii} The river was in a flood stage^{viii} because of the spring run-off from the mountain snows and because of heavy rains from a recent storm. This flooding hindered the rescue attempts immediately following

the accident and caused significant problems in the retrieval of bodies and the removal of debris during the subsequent days. Two days after the accident, bodies lay on the river bottom.^{ix} Newspapers published photographs of the disaster at the time. Since publishing photographs was still not easy, artists drew spectacular drawings, printed to illustrate the accident.

One picture particularly shows the rescuing of multiple people out of the swollen river.^x (Figure 1) The *London Times* reported that the festival was, “abandoned as soon as news reached the village of the calamity, and the villagers were called from their merry-making to assist in the work of rescue, while help was urgently demanded and promptly sent from Bâle (Basel) and other towns in the district.”^{xi} People looked for their spouses and parents for their children after the dead went from the river to a nearby orchard.^{xii}

There are a number of pertinent facts related to the accident. Following the accident, not only were all the Swiss railway bridges checked and upgraded but the “horror message” of the accident “decisively influenced the debate over the nationalization of the railways in Switzerland.”^{xiii} The parliament voted in favor of nationalization seven years later^{xiv} and in 1902,^{xv} the nationalization of most of the private railway companies became the SBB (the Federal Railway Company). Since then, the country avoided additional bridge accidents.

Long lasting lawsuits ensued, mainly against the private railroad company, the “Jura Simplon Bahn,” which had run the train, owned the railway line and the bridge.^{xvi} Alexandre Gustave Eiffel of Eiffel Tower fame designed the bridge in 1875.^{xvii} However, he was not involved in the lawsuits because the “Jura Simplon Bahn,” had upgraded structural details of the bridge in 1890. The government’s Post and Railway Department had monitored all installations of the private railways since 1878. A flood in 1881 eroded the abutment on one side, however the bridge along with all others in the country received inspection in 1880 and



Figure 3 The Münchenstein train engines and bridge debris in the Birs

1882 and it had passed the railway department inspection in 1890 after the upgrade to accommodate heavier locomotives. Shortly prior to 2:30 p.m. on June 14 a heavy freight train had passed over the bridge without incident yet the bridge caved in on this Sunday afternoon as the passenger train, estimated at less than half the weight of the freight train, was passing over.^{xviii}

The accident occurred in the Canton of Baselland, thus the archives there contain the records of the cantonal government's dealings about the accident and the records of the lawsuits in the cantonal courts.^{xix} The list of the dead published in newspaper articles includes the causes of death of many.^{xx} About 10 or so died of injuries, such as fractured skulls, fractured ribs, or bleeding to death.

In some cases, they were able only to recover body parts. In four cases, the victims' remained unidentified, while ten days later eight people were still officially missing.^{xxi} One report indicated the retrieval of a

horribly mutilated body.^{xxii} Some bodies possibly were swept down river by the flooding waters and never located.^{xxiii} Ten of the victims were children and it would appear that a whole family was among the victims.^{xxiv} Out of the 71 deaths, 52 were by 'erstickung,' suffocation or asphyxiation.^{xxv} Because of the high water in the river, many victims drowned, confined by the destroyed railway cars and bridge debris. A minor fact related in the book, "The Swiss Railway Saga 150 years of Swiss Trains," is that both engines were salvaged, repaired and served for 27 and 33 additional years,^{xxvi} the latter being retired only two years prior to grandmother's death in 1926.

The subsequent enquiry did not conclude whether the accident was due to bridge construction, excessive weight, or faulty driving; however, it is interesting how hindsight affects judgment. The report ordered by the government and published ten weeks after the accident gives a different impression of the bridge condition than that received from the inspections of 1880, 1882, and 1890. The two professors who did the investigation blamed the excess load for the

accident. Their report gave the following six points:

“The bridge had been too weak from the start and had faults in its design. The iron used did not correspond to the requirements in either firmness or tenacity. The flood of 1881 thoroughly damaged the bridge. The reinforcements, made in 1890, did not cover the bridge as a whole.

There was no derailment before the collapse of the bridge. The main cause of the collapse was the insufficiently strong middle spurs.^{xxvii}

Comparing the “pertinent facts” of the family story to the accident that happened in Münchenstein:

1. Significance: A disastrous or major train accident; it was the worst train accident in the 150 year history of the Swiss railway. The *New York Times* reported this as “one of the half dozen worst railroad accidents that ever occurred.”^{xxviii}

2. Time: Before her marriage in February 1893 (1884 to 1893); June 14, 1891 – grandmother was 26 years old at the time.

3. Area: In the northernmost part of Switzerland; Münchenstein, 10 kms south of the Swiss-German border where the Rhine River turns north to enter Germany, is almost the farthest north that one can be in the country.

4. Location: A bridge from which a train can fall into a river (preferably the Aare River); It was an iron bridge crossing the Birs River - unfortunately not the Aare River.

5. Cities: Related to Basel or Brugg in some way; Five kilometers south of Basel is a close relationship. It wasn't near Brugg but the Birs River starts with the same first letter.

6. Casualties: Multiple passengers and crew killed; Seventy-one dead and 171 injured is not ‘all’ but surely a significant number. Another report said 73 dead and 133 injured. According to the number of dead, it was the seventh, and the number of injured, fourth in severity in the world.^{xxix} This accident matches the pertinent facts of grandmother's story, but the further question remains: why was she to travel to Basel?

A) My grandmother had an aunt who, with her husband and family, lived in Kleinhüningen, a suburb of Basel. It is possible she could have intended to visit them; however, that suburb is on the north of Basel and not related to the train going south from Basel.

B) My grandmother played the zither very well so perhaps her trip has relation to music. Perhaps she was a performer at the festival, or perhaps her teacher, who was famous for his zither playing and composing, had scheduled to participate and she was going for that purpose. Unfortunately, the newspaper articles advertising the event do not give any information about zither players or other instrumentalists being involved. They only list the participating choirs and the program.^{xxx}

C) Perhaps she was a member of a choir from her area, scheduled to participate in the music festival and she intended to travel with them. After review of Rorschach and Goldach death records, there was no discovery of anyone else from those towns involved in the accident.^{xxxi} The newspaper reports of the deceased do not include any from the eastern part of Switzerland.^{xxxii} The list of choirs scheduled to participate in the festival included many from the northwest of Switzerland but there were none far distant from Basel.^{xxxiii}

The festival was a regional one not covering the whole or even a large part of Switzerland. It appears the reason for her trip must remain speculative. In order to be on the accident train grandmother would have left Rorschach at 6:07 am that Sunday morning arriving in Zürich at 9:00 am, transferred to a second train, left Zürich at 9:30 am, and arrived in Basel at 12:15 pm. The accident train was to leave Basel at 2:15 and arrive in Münchenstein at 2:26 pm.^{xxxiv} It left five minutes late because of adding engine and cars.

The festival was only the one day, Sunday morning and afternoon with the afternoon session to start at 2:00 pm.^{xxxv} Why were so many people traveling to the festival from Basel, after the morning session was finished,

planning to arrive even after the afternoon session had started? Likewise, if grandmother was going to the festival why would she have planned to arrive so long after the festival had started? She may not have been attending the festival. Perhaps, though, this is evidence that she had a specific task to accomplish, like playing only at a certain time without earlier necessity of arrival. There were other trains later in the day but all later trains that day would have arrived too late to allow participation in the festival. Probably after missing the train, there was no further resumption of service, for just after 2:30 that afternoon all railway stations in the country received notice of the accident by telegraph.

Whether or not her ticket could place her on the accident train is impossible to know. There are no records available of who purchased tickets or where passengers traveled, so it is not possible to find out if she actually purchased a train ticket or of its use.

Apparently there were countless episodes, “in newspapers, magazines and calendars... why this or the other person had been able to reach only one of the rear waggons (*sic*)... and therefore had stayed alive.”^{xxxvi} Perhaps one of the correspondents from Switzerland may have been accurate with his suggestion, “that because of the seriousness of the accident, her good fortune, the knowledge of the geographic location and of the people, your grandmother may have said – ‘Thank God I was not traveling to Basel, otherwise I might have been involved with this accident.’”^{xxxvii}

Although there are two things that do not match (lack of survivors and the name of the river), and unknown things remain (the why and exact place or her intended travel), there surely are several matching or corresponding historical facts indicating the Münchenstein train catastrophe as the one referred to in the story related by my father. For the present at least, grandmother’s missed train trip will remain part of my family’s history.

Endnotes:

ⁱ Meyer, Walter C., Carl H. Meyer (1896-1979) His Life, Philosophy, Descendants and Ancestors, Family History Library call number 929.271 M575mw, p.2.

ⁱⁱ June 1891 Swiss train schedules, photocopies of four pages from the Historic Department of the SBB

ⁱⁱⁱ Personal correspondences with the SBB in Bern.

^{iv} *The Swiss Railway Saga - 150 Years of Swiss Trains*, p. 112, photocopies of pages courtesy of the Historic Department of SBB, Bern, Switzerland,

^v E-mail 3 Mar 2003, from Michael Blatter of the State Archives of Basel-Land in Liestal, BL, Switzerland.

^{vi} Ibid

^{vii} *The Swiss Railway Saga*, op. cit.

^{viii} The *London Times* had reports daily for over a week. The *New York Times* had two reports, one on June 16 and another on June 21, 1891. Reports carried the Paris and Swiss newspapers.

^{ix} The *London Times* June 16, 1891 page 5 col b, June 17, 1891 page 5 col b, June 22, 1891 page 5 col f.

^x The *London Times* June 16, 1891 page 5 col e.

^{xi} E-mail 25 Jun 2003, from Michael Blatter, op. cit.

The picture was an illustration from the front page of a Paris newspaper *Le Petit Parisien. supplément littéraire illustré, 3me année, Nr. 125, 28.6.1891*,

^{xii} The *London Times* June 15, 1891 page 5 col d.

^{xiii} The *London Times* June 16, 1891 page 5 col b.

^{xiv} *The Swiss Railway Saga*, op. cit.

^{xv} Ibid.

^{xvi} E-mail 19 Feb 2003, from André Zahno of the Passenger Traffic division, Swiss National Railways (SBB).

^{xvii} E-mail 17 Mar 2003, from Michael Blatter, op. cit.

^{xviii} Ibid.

^{xix} *The Swiss Railway Saga*, op. cit.

^{xx} E-mail Michael Blatter, op. cit.

^{xxi} E-mail 27 Aug 2003, from Christoph Manasse, a private researcher at the State Archives of Basel-Land in Liestal, BL, with a copy of the accident death list published in June 1891 in Zürich, Switzerland.

^{xxii} Ibid.

^{xxiii} Ibid.

^{xxiv} The *London Times* June 16, 1891 page 5 col e.

^{xxv} *New York Times*, June 16, 1891 page 2 col 2. A paragraph in the *New York Times* report gave a graphic description of the carnage: “As the wreckage was cleared away the bodies of the dead and dying were found crushed together in ghastly confusion amid the almost inextricable mass of debris. The whole night long the rescuers toiled, gleaning an occasional survivor out of the ruins. The moans of the injured heard in the early hours of the night ceased as death or rescue reached them. Most of the bodies recovered were dreadfully mutilated. A dead mother was found holding in her arms her lifeless baby while another child lay across her body. Several other family groups were seen joined by a common fate.”

^{xxvi} The accident death list op. cit.

^{xxvii} *The Swiss Railway Saga*, op. cit.

^{xxviii} Ibid.

^{xxix} *New York Times*, June 21, 1892 page 14 col 4.

^{xxx} Ibid.

^{xxx}ⁱ E-mail 6 Oct 2003, from Christoph Manasse. Enclosed were copies of two newspaper clippings from the "Basellandschaftliche Zeitung" (12 June 1891, Nr. 70, Liestal). One announced the time and listed the choirs scheduled to participate, the other listed the program and times of the festival events.

^{xxx}ⁱⁱ Parish records in FHL film #948671 Katholische Kirche from Rorschach, St. Gallen; FHL film #939590 Evangelisch-Reformierte Kirche from Rorschach, SG; FHL film #948676 Katholische Kirche from Goldach, SG.

^{xxx}ⁱⁱⁱ The accident death list op. cit.

^{xxx}^{iv} E-mail 6 Oct 2003, from Christoph Manasse, op. cit.

^{xxx}^v 1891 train schedule, op. cit

^{xxx}^{vi} E-mail 6 Oct 2003, from Christoph Manasse, op. cit.

^{xxx}^{vii} E-mail 12 Mar 2003, from Michael Blatter of the State Archives of Basel-Land in Liestal, BL, Switzerland.

Photographs:

Figure 1 - Photograph of an illustration from the front page of a Paris newspaper of 28 Jun 1891 "Le Petit Parisien. supplément littéraire illustré, 3me année, Nr. 125, 28.6.1891" Courtesy of the Baselland Staatsarchiv in Liestal, BL, Switzerland.

Figure 2 - Photo by an unknown photographer showing the engines and bridge debris in the river with the last cars on the embankment. Obtained from the web site www.fwmuenchenstein.ch (click on Einsätze then Einsätzeberichte then 14.06.1891 Eisenbahnunglück - HTML)

Figure 3 - The train engines and the collapsed bridge in the Birs River because of the Münchenstein catastrophe. Courtesy of the Baselland Staatsarchiv in Liestal, BL, Switzerland.

DRAWING ON THE PAST MAPPING MEDIEVAL ENGLAND, IRELAND, SCOTLAND AND WALES

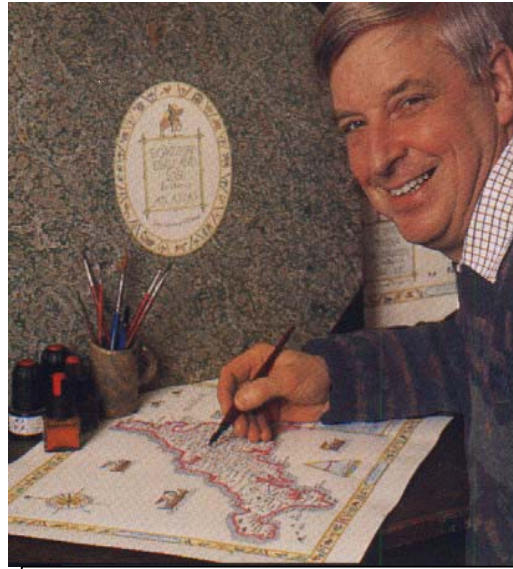
John Garnons Williams

Map-making is a much younger art than most people appreciate. Surveying as a science blossomed in the middle to late 1500s, under the influence of men such as Mercator. Then, European countries received maps. The concept of accurate mapping had simply not occurred to the medieval mind.

This is a sad deficiency for the modern historian or genealogist, because a map is what they will look for while in the preliminary stages of research. Yet the fact that there were no accurate maps in the Middle Ages does not mean that we have no geographical information from that period. If you dig deep enough into place-names and family names you can learn a great deal, and over the past twenty-five years the historical cartographer and genealogist John Garnons Williams has done just that. (John's own fascination in maps stemmed from his earlier career as a military helicopter pilot. In his own words, "Helicopter pilots don't really need to be able to read or write, but they certainly do need to understand maps.")

The Domesday Collection

In 1986, to mark the 900th anniversary of the famous Domesday Book, John published a series of 44 exquisitely hand-drawn, decorated maps of the counties of England, as they had been in the time of William the Conqueror. Nearly ten thousand of the place-names recorded in Domesday Book, the great tax survey of England undertaken after the Norman Conquest, are shown with their original spellings. Thousands of these names, of course, survive in English surnames, linking people all around the world with the often-tiny villages where their ancestors lived so many centuries ago. Forgotten spellings such as Eurvicscire for Yorkshire, Grantebrike for Cambridge or even Snotingham for Nottingham reveal the



John Garnons Williams

original meaning of the names. (To make the maps fully accessible, John supplies with each map a translation 'Key Map' showing the equivalent modern place-names.)

The borders of the maps and the rustic scenes on them are inspired by the Bayeux Tapestry (which was actually made in England not France). The American cartographic review, *Mapline*, praised the Domesday Collection as "a delightful series of maps ...which repay close study.... They really demonstrate how much William the Conqueror missed in being unable to translate his material into graphic form." Soon after completing the series, John's unique achievement received recognition with his election as a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society.

Medieval Ireland, Scotland and Wales

After years working on England, John, himself of Welsh descent, turned his attention to the Celtic countries (which had not been included in Domesday Book). The resulting three maps, created after extensive research into place-names and family names, bring the early histories of these countries alive as never before. On the maps of Ireland and Scotland, in particular, where many major clans and families have territorial connections stretching back to medieval times; these names also display their contemporary spellings. The Book of Kells, the supreme

example of Celtic art, provides many of the decorations. Meticulous research went into the accompanying booklets, which explain the meaning of each place-name, and, in the case of Ireland and Scotland, every clan and family name shown on the maps.

Available on the Internet

Fascinating and accessible to both professional and amateur historians, a delight to map lovers and to those interested in their family's past, The Domesday Collection is a unique and timeless work of major artistic as well as historical value. John Garnons Williams's maps are available in a large hand-coloured Limited Edition at \$75 and in smaller editions for less than \$30. For viewing and ordering information, <http://www.maps-maps-maps.com>.

USING NEWSPAPERS IN GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH

Therese Fisher, AG®

As we work on locating ancestors and try to put a face and personality to the bare bones details of our research, a wonderful source of stories and facts is in the pages of newspapers.

Scanning a newspaper today will give you an idea of what can be located in the earlier papers, published at the time of significant events in our ancestors' lives.

Obituaries are an incredible source of information about family relationships and the social relationships that were significant to the deceased. While earlier obituaries vary somewhat from those of today, they still provide a window into the past.

The earliest obituaries were minimal for the information they supplied on the deceased as well as his/her family. Unless the person was noteworthy, it often consists of the person's name, date, and place of death. While that is not much by today's standards, in the years before death certificates that can be a jackpot. Victorian era obituaries tend to be more verbose and elaborate on either the details of the deceased's life or personality. That carried over, to a degree, into the early twentieth century. An important fact to keep in mind while searching for an ancestor's obituary is that not everyone had an obituary in the paper. A person more likely to have an obituary was either prominent in the community, had money, died in an unusual manner, or a person/family that resided in the community for several generations. Poor or average people were not likely to be in earlier obituaries unless they met a violent end. In those cases, it is more likely that they would be in a newspaper story as opposed to an obituary. Even today, usually in larger cities, families pay to have an obituary put into the newspaper.

Death notices are slightly different from obituaries. A death notice resembles the very earliest obituaries in that it usually gives just

the name and death date of the deceased and the funeral home who was handling the arrangements.

Marriage announcements made newspapers as early as the late 1700's. The typical marriage notice was short and stated such things as the names of the parties getting married, the minister's name, and date of the marriage and, sometimes, the parent of the bride or groom. As with obituaries, not every marriage received the paper's attention, although there were more marriage notices for the average person than obituaries.

Advertisements are an often overlooked but enriching source of details of our ancestors. Hat makers, doctors, booksellers, music teachers and dry goods merchants are just a sample of who might place an advertisement in the newspaper. You can also find ads for runaway slaves and apprentices, houses for sale or rent, property foreclosures and some very entertaining ads for cures. A reader could become so entertained in reading the advertisements that the reader could forget what they were actually searching for (this is from personal experience).

Classified ads eventually included some of the advertisements mentioned above as well as requests for job applicants, notices of non-responsibility for debts and household goods for sale.

News stories, the heart of a newspaper, include stories about the people who lived and worked in the area as well as stories of national interest. A wonderful way to learn how the people in a community felt about a war, a new law or an event of local interest, is to read the local coverage of the event and observe the tone of the article as well as related articles in later issues. While a newspaper will not reflect 100 percent of the views of the local people, it should reflect a general attitude that can help put the event into the perspective of time and place.

The Dead Letter files from local newspapers are a wonderful way to zero in on a death date or a date of immigration. A letter was an important link to family. Unless the recipient was unable to pick it up, owners asserted claims. Scanning the lists of dead

letters can often give clues about when an ancestor left the area either in a wagon or in a coffin.

Personal ads were also a part of 19th century newspapers. The better-known ads in the Boston newspapers of Irish family and friends trying to locate either new immigrants or family members in the area are not the only personal ads in newspapers. Some of the best ones, however, are in ethnic newspapers, such as German community newspapers. Unfortunately, those newspapers are frequently in the native tongue of its readers.

As you can see, a trip to the Library of Congress, state archives or historical society, or a good local college library can be well worth the time spent in locating fascinating details and information about our ancestors. Many newspapers have been microfilmed and are available through interlibrary loan.

GENEALOGY AT THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Reginald Downs

The Library of Congress in Washington, DC features one of the world's premier collections of United States and foreign genealogical and local historical publications.

The beginning of the Library's genealogical collection includes works from the 1815 purchase of Thomas Jefferson's library: the Domesday Book, Sir William Dugdale's *The Baronetage of England*, and *Peerage of Ireland*.

In August 1935, a "Reading Room for American Local History and Genealogy" was opened on Deck 47 in the Main Building, today called the Thomas Jefferson Building, "to provide a more adequate service for those coming to the Library from all parts of the United States to consult our unusually large and important collections of genealogy, including states and local history, and to throw proper safeguards about these collections, large portions of which are irreplaceable."

Today, sixty-nine years later, the statement remains true, although the Reading Room has changed locations several times to accommodate the growing collections and expansion of the focus of the room to its present international scope. For example, the reference collection contained 2,500 volumes in 1935; today (2004) it has 6,000. Since 1935, the Local History and Genealogy Reading Room has seen relocation to six physical homes, four administrative changes, varying hours of service, and new generations of staff.

Overview of Collections and Projects

The collections are especially strong in North American, British Isles and Irish, French, German, and Scandinavian sources. The majority of the genealogies are gifts from around the world. The Australians have been particularly generous, and their donations have greatly enhanced British Isles and

Australian research at the Library of Congress. These international strengths are further supported and enriched by the Library's incomparable royalty, nobility, and heraldry collection, making it one of a few libraries in America that offer such comprehensive collections.

In addition to the national and international genealogy and local history collections at the Library of Congress, one may find other related material of great significance to these fields in the areas of archival resources, biography, church history, city directories, folklore, geography, and history. Special collections of manuscripts, maps and atlases, microforms, newspapers, photographs, rare books, CD-ROMs, and other electronic forms, housed in various custodial divisions of the Library also contain important genealogical resources. For further discussion of these tools, read below.

Fortunately, the Library has a number of outstanding tools to help access these collections, *The Library of Congress: A Guide to Genealogical and Historical Research*, by James Neagles (Salt Lake City: Ancestry Publishing, 1990), is a comprehensive handbook for the Library's genealogical collections and inventories the Library's vast city directories collection. Additionally, the Library has more than two dozen reference guides to assist genealogical researchers.

For remote access, the Library of Congress provides many resources and services via the Internet, all of which are detailed or available from the Library's homepage at (<http://www.loc.gov>). The Local History and Genealogy Reading Room's homepage (<http://www.loc.gov/rr/genealogy>) provides general information about the reading room (hours; location; requirements for reader registration; information about tours; descriptions of the collections; details for presenting gift books to the Library; the full-text of the reading room's bibliographies and guides; and links to other Internet sources on local history and genealogy).

Equally important, both the Library's and the LH&G's homepages provide access to the Library's online catalog. The Library is beginning to link catalog records to digital versions of actual works, offering some digital versions of books in the collections. More than 300 local histories are digitally accessible on the Library's American Memory site, though currently, no genealogies. To search for citations to genealogies using the Library's online catalog, use the search term "Family" after the name of the family, e.g., Downs Family.

The Library is currently engaged in several digital projects to make its collection more accessible. One is the BECites +Project that began in 1999. The BECites Project's goal is to enhance traditional printed library bibliographies by placing them on the Web in electronic form and by including annotated citations, indexes, table of contents, and back of book bibliographies cited therein. Additionally, there are reciprocal links between all of these data elements and the online catalog record. LH&G has added hotlinks to table of contents, indexes, sources cited, and catalog records for the Immigrant Arrivals biography (http://www.loc.gov/rr/genealogy/bib_guid_e/immigrant). Another digital project is the Table of Contents Project. The Digital Table of Contents project creates machine-readable data from surrogates of the actual table of contents. The Table of Contents of United States Genealogies Project is an ongoing effort to link the table of contents of United States genealogies with bibliographic records. Presently, more than 800 books have been included.

Aside from digital versions of a few local histories, material in microform for which the Library holds the master negative is available for interlibrary loan. The Library has microfilmed all of its holdings in class CS71 (United States Genealogy), published from 1876 to 1900. Interlibrary loan allows use of a significant part of the genealogical collection in libraries around the country. To identify genealogy titles on microfilm consult *Genealogies Catalogued by the Library of*

Congress Since 1986: With a List of Established Forms of Family Names and a List of Genealogies Converted to Microfilm Since 1983 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1991). The Library of Congress does not permit its books on genealogy, heraldry, and United States local history to circulate on interlibrary loan. The Library's Photoduplication Service can supply photocopies of items located in the Library's collection if there are no copyright restrictions.

The **Local History and Genealogy Reading Room (LH&G)**, a small, specialized, reading room, answers questions about heraldry, royalty and nobility, biography, naval and maritime history, American history, as well as genealogy and local history. The Library has more than 40,000 genealogies and more than 100,000 local histories from the many genealogies that are self-published and given to the Library for many generations from around the world. A "Gifts" information sheet designed to assist authors in donating their family histories to the Library is available by mail from the Local History and Genealogy Reading Room homepage (<http://www.loc.gov/rr/genealogy>).

The Library acquires published material in a variety of ways. In addition to gifts, the Library of Congress relies heavily on copyright deposits for additions to its collections. If it is not possible to acquire a publication through donation or copyright, the Library makes every effort to purchase a copy. While the Library's collections are outstanding, one does not find every published genealogy here; to identify genealogies available elsewhere, book catalogs and online tools, including the Internet, are used.

The Local History and Genealogy Reading Room, with a staff of ten, is located on the Ground Floor of the Jefferson Building, LJ G-42; it offers specialized card catalogs that index genealogy, heraldry, and local history in the collections. The Reference Desk maintains an inventory of the Library's extensive collection of city

directories. Primary Source Microfilms' *City Directories of the United States*, in the Microform Reading Room, is a microform collection of directories from selected cities and towns, dating from the colonial period to as recently as 1960. See *U.S. City Directories in the Microfilm Reading Room* (<http://www.loc.gov/rr/microform/uscity/>) for a list of cities and towns. The Library's extensive collection of unclassified city directories in paper supplements these microforms.

The LH&G Reading Room also offers public Internet terminals and subscription databases. Of special interest are *AncestryPlus* and *Heritage Quest Online* that offer digital images of the U.S. federal census. The latter database also provides thousands of family histories, local histories, and primary sources in full image. Much of this material is in the Library's collection. Another important electronic resource is *ProQuest Historical Newspapers* that offer full text and full image articles from the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Washington Post*.

In addition to its genealogy collection, many of the Library's twenty-one reading rooms offer essential sources for genealogy. The Library's historic **Main Reading Room** (<http://www.loc.gov/rr/main/>) through its catalogs, 70,000 volumes of print reference works and a wide variety of electronic resources, is the primary entrance into the Library's general collections. It is the principal reading room for work in the social sciences and humanities.

The **Microform Reading Room** (<http://lcweb.loc.gov/rr/microform>) offers much of interest to the genealogist. In addition to published family histories and local U.S. histories that have been filmed for preservation, the reading room has the British Manuscript Project collection, a selection of materials from the ninth through the eighteenth centuries that include manuscripts, archival records and rare printed material from major public and private collections in England and Wales. The Irish Genealogy Manuscripts Collection offers genealogical

material filmed at the National Library of Ireland from medieval to modern times. Anne Toohey's *Irish Genealogical Office Manuscripts: A Guide to Microfilm* unlocks this collection. The Challen Typescripts are transcripts of parish registers [predominantly from London and vicinity]. Additional parish register lists are in the Microform Reading Room's Card Catalog. The microform collection of city directories of the United States is complemented by the New York City telephone directories, from 1878-1959, for the boroughs of New York City plus selected towns in the surrounding areas of New York and New Jersey, also available on microfilm. Other important microform collections include:

- Slave narratives, which are interviews with former slaves recorded between 1936 and 1938 by the Federal Writers Project. (Copies of the original transcripts are in the Manuscript Division and digitized on American Memory(<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtm/snhome.html>))
- The Barbour Collection, which indexes vital records transcribed from pre-1850 records for most Connecticut towns.
- Massachusetts Vital Records to 1850, and for some towns until around the beginning of the twentieth century. (Also available electronically on *AncestryPlus* and *New England Ancestors*.)
- "A Genealogy of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence," comprising twenty typescript volumes.

The **Manuscript Reading Room** (<http://www.loc.gov/rr/mss>) provides public access to one of the Library's premier collections. A researcher may consult microfilm of the Draper Manuscripts, historical and biographical material amassed by Lyman C. Draper, covering the period from 1735 to 1815 in areas east of the Mississippi from New York State to Charleston, South Carolina. The American Loyalists Claims from the British Public

Records Office (PRO), Audit Offices 12 and 13, as well as copies of other records from the PRO, are other sources. For German-Americans, useful resources are microfilm of the Hamburg ship passenger lists, listing those emigrating from Hamburg from 1850-1873. The "Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church of America, Diocese of Alaska, 1733-1938" is another large collection of genealogical value. Almost all collections of personal papers in the Division contain some family data.

The **Genealogy and Map Reading Room** (<http://www.loc.gov/rr/geogmap/>) has a strong international collection of material that can help researchers identify geographic locations-- particularly in Eastern Europe, where numerous name and political affiliation changes have occurred. This Division's collection of gazetteers and atlases greatly aids identifying place names and locations. These tools may help locate the place of origin of families who emigrated from America in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. County atlases from 1825 show land ownership; some 1500 county land ownership maps date from the early nineteenth century; and ward maps are essential in obtaining ward numbers needed to undertake census research in major cities. U.S. Geological Survey Topographical Quadrangles from the 1880s are helpful in locating cemeteries as well as boundary lines described on plats and deeds. Fire insurance maps from 1867 to the present in the Sanborn collection indicate the size, shape, and construction of dwellings in 12,000 cities and towns. The Sanborn Maps, 1867-1970, are digitized and searchable at the Library.

The **Newspaper and Current Periodicals Reading Room** (<http://www.loc.gov/rr/news/>) has a large collection of U.S. and foreign newspapers on microfilm and in hard copy. The Reading Room's reference collection has a number of indexes to newspapers and abstracts of marriage records, such as *Marriage Notices from Richmond, Virginia Newspapers, 1821-1840*, death notices, obituaries, and other data

of genealogical interest from a wide variety of local newspapers.

The **Rare Book and Special Collections Reading Room** (<http://www.loc.gov/rr/rarebook/>) has some material of interest to historians and genealogists, including the *Confederate States Imprints*; almanacs; printed documents of the Colonial Congress and the colonial governments of New England; and the Charles H. Banks' material pertaining to early Pilgrim families in Massachusetts. Large numbers of local histories, published and unpublished genealogies, pre-1861 city directories, and the Library's collection of works published prior to 1801, are all accessible in the Rare Book Room.

Other reading rooms are also very useful for researching genealogy. The **European** (<http://www.loc.gov/rr/european/>), **Hispanic**, (<http://www.loc.gov/rr/hispanic/>), **Asian** (<http://www.loc.gov/rr/asian/>), and **African and Middle Eastern** (<http://www.loc.gov/rr/amed/>) reading rooms can be essential for genealogical research in these areas. The European Reading Room reference collection contains works relating to coats-of-arms for families in Eastern Europe.

While the Library is rich in collections of manuscripts, microfilms, newspapers, photographs, maps, and published material, it is not an archive or repository for unpublished or primary source county, state, or church records. Researchers seeking county records will need to visit the courthouse or a library in the county of interest, the state archives, the Family History Library in Salt Lake City or one of its many Family History Centers, all of which may have the original county records or microform copies. Libraries, archives, and genealogical and historical societies at the national, state, and local levels are all vital resources in this complex puzzle of genealogical research.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

REGINALD DOWNS has worked as a reference librarian in public and private libraries and is currently a reference librarian in the Local History and Genealogy Reading Room at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC. His area of research expertise is in the area of African American genealogical research. Downs earned an MLS from the Catholic University of America, a BS in media technology from the University of the District of Columbia and holds memberships in the Association of Professional Genealogist and Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society.

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JOHN GARNONS WILLIAMS was born in Plymouth, Devon, in 1946 and now lives in Shrewsbury, Shropshire, with wife, Kate, who is a Classical Historian. Educated at Westminster College and Bristol University, he served as a helicopter pilot in the Royal Air Force from 1968-1984. From 1978 on, he has been working on historical and genealogical maps, initially as a hobby and later full-time. His election to be a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society in 1986 came after completing a series of forty-four maps showing England as it was in the Domesday Book. His latest work is a Map of Exploration.