NEWSLETTER

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Madison County Genealogical Society, Box 631, Edwardsville, IL 62025-0631

DUES 2024:

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OFFICERS:
Pres.: Robert Ridenour
rwridenour566@gmail.com
V. Pres.: Mary Westerhold
mtw127@gmail.com
Corres. Sec.: Lynn Engelman
lae21@verizon.net
Rec. Sec.: Rose Mary Oglesby
roglesby25@yahoo.com
Treas.: Ferne Ridenour
faridenour@gmail.com
Newsletter: Robert Ridenour
rwridenour566@gmail.com
Quarterly: Mary Westerhold
mtw127@gmail.com
Librarian: Mary Westerhold
mtw127@gmail.com
Researcher: David Axtell
david.axtell@gmail.com

DUES! DUES! DUES! DUES! DUES! DUES! DUES!

Dues for 2025 are now being accepted. We would very much appreciate receiving your renewal checks ASAP. Send your renewal checks to:

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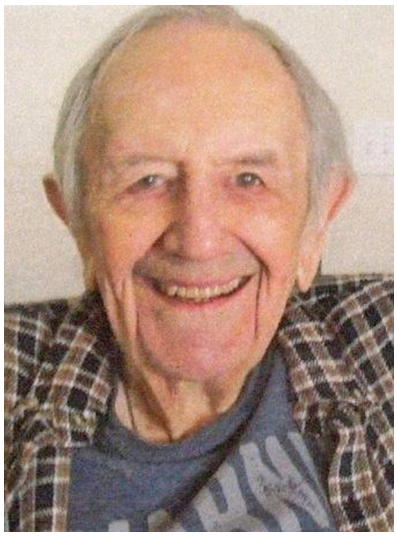
Death of a Life Member – Gaylord James, Jr



Dr. Gaylord James Jr., known to his family and many friends as Jim, died on September 12, 2024. Jim was born April 22, 1930, in Cleveland, Ohio; his parents were Gaylord Joseph James and Erma Leonie (Taylor) James.

He graduated from Western Reserve Academy in Hudson, Ohio, in 1948 and received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Williams College in 1952 and a Doctor of Dental Surgery degree from Western Reserve University, School of Dentistry (now Case-Western Reserve, School of Dental Medicine) in 1956.

He served in the U.S. Navy at the Naval Dental Clinic in Norfolk, Virginia, and as the dental officer aboard the USS Truckee (AO 147). Subsequent to his honorable discharge from the navy, he served as a clinical associate in the Department of Dental Surgery at the Cleveland Clinic for one year, and then went into private practice.

He was appointed an assistant professor in fixed prosthodontics in 1970 at his alma mater; he later attended Indiana University, School of Dentistry and earned a Certificate of Postgraduate Study in Fixed and Removable Prosthodontics. In 1979, he accepted an appointment of Associate Professor in the Department of Restorative Dentistry at Southern Illinois University, School of Dental Medicine in Alton, Illinois. He retired from that position in 2003.

After retirement he volunteered in several local organizations. He was a member of the Sons of the American Revolution and was active in the local and state societies. He was a charter member of the Genl George Rogers Clark Chapter of Madison County, Illinois, a component of the Illinois Society of the S A R. He served as president of that chapter from 2009 to 2011. He was much involved in genealogy and was a Life Member of the Madison County Genealogical Society, and taught genealogy classes at Lewis and Clark Community College in Godfrey, Illinois.

In 2011 he moved to Glenville, New York, and served in several ministries associated with the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Glenville and volunteered at the Glendale Nursing Home. Aside from other varied interests, he was involved in collecting railroad artifacts, and his model train collections.

He is survived by his dear cousin Harriet (Taylor) Howard and her children: Herschel, Jr. (Joyce), Paul, Hollis, Clay, (Kathleen), and William (Adele), their children and grandchildren and other cousins.

A Mass of Christian Burial was held at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, 400 Saratoga Road, Glenville, New York, on Thursday, September 19, 2024. Burial followed at the Gerald B. H. Solomon National Cemetery.

MCGS Meeting October 2024

Have you ever wondered how unmarked graves can be found? Have you searched for an unmarked grave of a family member that family lore states was buried in a certain area of the cemetery?

One method that is often used is grave dowsing. Similar to dowsing for water, it can indicate where previously unknown graves are located. Although the identity of the person buried there cannot be determined using dowsing, knowing the location and using other clues found in traditional research may help give a name to an unidentified burial. It is claimed that the sex of the person being dowsed can betermined by the direction the rods swing.

The latest meeting of the Madison County Genealogical Society on Sunday, October 27, at 1:30 pm at the Vaughn Hill Cemetery in Wood River, was a demonstration of this process. The cemetery boundaries were recently surveyed and new areas with possible unmarked graves were searched. Shirley Daiber, who has been dowsing for graves for over 30 years, was the presenter, and instructor for those who wished to try dowsing for themselves.

The event was well attended, but the exact attendance is not known. Additional dowsing rods were available for those interested in trying dowsing themselves and almost everyone there took advantage of this opportunity. Does dowsing work? Some in attendance said it worked for them; others could not do it.

I do not want to say it does not work, but I tried it myself and my results were questionable. The way the dowsing rods were made, they had to be held perfectly level with absolutely no movement of your hands. The least movement of your hands caused the rods to move. Walking in a cemetery while holding the rods both level and not moving your hands is not an easy thing to do. Let me just say I doubted my results.

What Our Ancestors Died of
by Terrence Punch

Some genealogists collect only ancestors, that is, people from whom they are personally descended. When traced out on a sheet of paper or a spreadsheet you have a pattern resembling an inverted Christmas tree, wide at the top and pointed at the bottom. Others take a great deal of trouble to track down collateral relatives, the siblings of ancestors and their descendants. If they began with a couple of progenitors, the result will tend to spread more widely with the passing of the generations.

This is not always the case. One couple had eleven children, sixteen grandchildren, but just four great-grandchildren, all four of whom grew to adulthood, two of them married and none of them had children. Within three generations a large family had completely died out. Imagine the original matriarch, dying in 1883 leaving eight children and nine grandchildren, and in 2003 her last descendant died, childless.

One of the reasons why people try to compile genealogies linking collateral relatives as well as direct ancestors is to produce a health history of their wider family circle. They ask questions about age at death, causes of death, conditions that appeared to run in the family, handicaps, tendency to accidents and mishaps, even towards suicide.

A circumstance that interferes with this effort is that records, if they exist, often fail to reveal people's cause of death. Another snag is that the deaths were attributed to conditions and ailments with unfamiliar names. We really do have to wonder who made the diagnosis written down as the cause of death. We can understand "drowned," "typhoid," or "pneumonia," but what did someone

mean by “senile decay”? Had the patient become moldy with age? And what did the sexton mean when he entered “senility” as the reason that a three-year-old died? To allege “premature ageing” would be ridiculous. Since the same man gave that cause of death to more than one child, we can assume that he did not understand the word.

Whenever possible, learn whether there were outbreaks of epidemic disease in an area about the time your relative died. If a child died while a smallpox outbreak ravaged the vicinity, consider that may have killed your family member too. Halifax had smallpox at the turn of the nineteenth century, as well as cholera epidemics a few decades later. There was a visitation of the mis-named “Spanish” influenza after the end of World War One.

Nor should we forget disasters such as the Halifax explosion of 1917, or mine disasters. In coastal communities several men may have perished in a marine mishap. Diphtheria wiped out households of children, as did scarlet fever and so forth. In doing a genealogy, be alert to these group deaths, as they may signify the presence of contagious disease or some tragedy, such as a house fire. Not to be morbid, but the media tended then, as now, to cover such events. Victorian papers seem to have reveled in headlines such as “Melancholy accident,” “Tragedy at sea,” etc.

Here are some examples I’ve seen in records:

ague - any of several feverish conditions, e.g., malaria (not so odd when you remember how many seamen visited tropical ports in the age of sail, and contracted illnesses)
bad blood - euphemism for venereal disease, especially syphilis
bilious fever - any of hepatitis, malaria, typhoid (caused by bacteria salmonella)
bladder in the throat - diphtheria
carbuncle - large boil (not usually fatal); skin cancer (then often fatal)
consumption - tuberculosis
cramp colic - appendicitis, peritonitis; also simply “colic”
debility - lack of energy or movement, probably due to an unrecognized illness
dentition - teething (hard to imagine this as fatal in itself; probably other complications)
dropsy - congestive heart failure; also noted as “hydrothorax”
falling sickness - epilepsy
flux - diarrhea; hemorrhage
gleet - inflamed membrane in the urethra
green sickness - anemia
horrors - delirium tremens
infantile paralysis - poliomyletis
jail fever, ship fever - typhus (caused by bacteria rickettsia)
king’s evil - tuberculosis in the neck and lymph glands; also called
scrofula (until Queen Anne, monarchs actually touched the afflicted; popular belief was that the king’s touch cured it)
milk fever - children contracted this bacterial disease from milk from cows having brucellosis
mortification - gangrene (common before antiseptics)
nostalgia - homesickness; the belief that immigrants died pining for their native land
old age - applied to people as young as 55 (making some of us positively “ancient”)
palsy - paralysis; also uncontrollable jerking of limbs; also entered as “fits”
screws - rheumatism
senility - advanced old age; perhaps Alzheimer’s; wrongly applied to young people
visitation by God - many sudden deaths due to natural causes, e.g, strokes, were called this

Below is a website for those who want to see a list of obsolete diagnoses:

http://www.homeoint.org/cazalet/oldnames.htm

Clues in Names

(Excerpted from Unpuzzling Your Past. Fourth Edition, Updated, by Emily Anne Croom, pp. 37-39.)

Naming practices vary from place to place and generation to generation. However, certain consistencies have existed for nearly four centuries in the area we now call the United States. Children were, and still are, often named for parents, grandparents, and other relatives.

Namesakes

For generations, given names have come from surnames, such as Allen, Cameron, Clyde, Davis, Dudley, Elliot, Glenn, Keith, Lloyd, Spencer, and many others. This practice gave these nineteenth-century Southerners interesting name combinations: Green Cash, Ransom Cash, Pleasant Pigg, Wiley Crook, Hardy Flowers, Eaton Cotton, Green P. Rice, and DeForest Menace. When an ancestor has a surname as a given name, think clue. Was it the mother's maiden name? A grandmother's maiden name? Another relative's given name? Only research can answer these questions.

For example, Benjamin Allen Phillips (1801) was named for his grandfather Benjamin Allen. Emily Cooper (1882) was named for her father's deceased first wife, Emily (Blalock) Cooper. Emily Cooper Blalock (1874) was named for the same deceased lady, in this case, her father's sister. On the other hand, Pitser Miller Blaloc (1848) was named for a neighbor not thought to be a relative.

Naming Patterns

Various genealogists have suggested a pattern to naming practices of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in England and Wales, which may give clues for studying families of the American colonies and the United States.

Eldest son	often named for the father's father
Second son	for the mother's father
Third son	for the father
Fourth son	for the father's eldest brother
Eldest daughter	for the mother's mother
Second daughter	for the father's mother
Third daughter	for the mother
Fourth daughter	for the mother's eldest sister

In the United States, this pattern may be considered a possibility but not a rule. Some families did name eldest sons for paternal grandfathers, but the naming of children for relatives generally followed no particular pattern or order. Families also named eldest sons for relatives on both sides of the family, or for no one in particular.

Each of the following was an eldest child. Hunter Orgain Metcalfe (1887) was given his maternal grandmother's maiden name, Orgain. Samuel Black Brelsford (1829) was named for his maternal grandfather, Samuel Black. Edward Philpot Blalock (1837) was named for his father's foster brother, Edward Philpot. Mary Eliza Catherine Coleman (1848) received a name from each grandmother.

Be alert to recurring given names or middle names in a family, especially over several generations.

The middle name Steele in the Isaac McFadden family of Chester County, South Carolina, was used for one of his children and several of his grandchildren and great-grandchildren. The name turned out to be the maiden name of Isaac's first wife, Elizabeth Steele. The other recurring middle name in that family was Ewing, the middle name of two of Isaac's children and several descendants. Perhaps it is a clue to someone else's maiden name. Studying the extended family cluster helps you identify such repetition of names and may identify the reason.

Given Names

The genealogist becomes aware of other naming practices. Of course, a daughter was, and still is, sometimes given a feminine form of her father's name: Josephine (Joseph), Georgianna (George), Pauline (Paul), or Philippa (Philip). Almanzon Huston had a daughter named Almazona.

Some children were, and are, indeed; named for relatives. However, others carry the names of famous Americans or prominent local personalities. In the early years of the republic, some families showed their patriotic feelings by naming daughters or sons Liberty, Justice, or America. Other nineteenth-century families gave daughters the same names as states and cities: Arizona, Carolina, Georgia,

Indiana, Louisiana, Missouri, Philadelphia, Tennessee, and Virginia. Nineteenth-century census records revealed these interesting names. Florida Ferry, Arkansas Neighbors, French Fort, Egypt Land, Vienna Wood, and Australia Shepherd.

These people from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had a title for a given name: Major Topping, Admiral Croom, Squire Blalock, Pharaoh Lee, Doctor Godwin, Lieutenant Campbell, and Patsy Empress Jones.

Every culture and era seems to have names whose origins are obscure. They may be nicknames, made-up names, combinations of other names, names of characters in literature of the period, or place names. Parents may have simply liked the sound of a name or wanted to choose something different. Sometimes the names researchers find in records are the result of phonetic spelling. Some may be corruptions of other names or attempts to keep names in a family within a particular pattern, such as names in alphabetical order or names beginning with the same initials. These are some of the numerous such names found in this country from 1750 to the present: Benoba, Bivy, Bozilla, Callie, Dicy, Dovie, Fena, Floice, Hattie, Jincey, Kitsey, Laney, Levicy, Lottie, Lovie, Luvenia, Mittie, Nicey, Olan, Olean, Ora, Ottie, Ozora, Parilee, Parizade, Periby, (Pheribah, Pheriby, Fereby), Perlissa, Rebia, and Sinah.

U.S. Counties Created or Abolished, 1920-1983
by William Dollarhide

The following list of counties was derived from *Map Guide to the U.S. Federal Censuses, 1790-1920*, by William Thorndale and William Dollarhide (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 1987). The original purpose of the *Map Guide* was to show the evolution of county boundaries from one federal census to the next; to allow a better understanding of the genealogy of the county jurisdictions; and to lead a researcher to the location of the correct modern county courthouse where records for an ancestor may be stored today. All county boundaries and name changes, 1790-1920, can be seen graphically on its maps, and all county names (modern, obsolete, or extinct counties) are included in the book's county index, with a reference to a map zone for a location. Only those few counties that were created and abolished between any two federal census years--those never appearing on any federal census--are omitted from the *Map Guide*. The modern counties are complete through 1987, the year the *Map Guide* was first published.

Since the period of coverage for the *Map Guide* ends with 1920 and since the 1950 census has been released, researchers have raised questions concerning changes in counties and county boundaries made after that year. The list below includes the names of the counties created after the 1920 federal census, as well as counties abolished after 1920. This list can be used to determine the counties appearing (or not appearing) in the 1930, 1940, or 1950 census. Since the 1790-1920 maps in the book show the underlying modern boundaries for all U.S. counties, any county created after 1920 is easy to find in the *Map Guide* on the various maps. The list assembled for this article can be construed as an addendum to the *Map Guide*, bringing the volume up to date to the federal census of 1990, which, according to current federal privacy policies, should be made public in the year 2062.

The following list includes changes to Virginia's counties and independent cities since 1920; however, other county mergers, city/county consolidations, and "unified governments" are not identified. This trend of consolidation began in 1963 when the city of Nashville and Davidson County, Tennessee, merged into one government, marking the first major U.S. city to form a "metropolitan government." Since then, about 20 city/county consolidations, mergers, or joint government operations have taken place. There are at least that many city/county consolidations under consideration and awaiting a vote by the local citizenry. About a dozen county mergers have also occurred since 1990, where two or more counties have joined together to form a single government. Most of these jurisdictional changes have taken place after 1990. Please keep in mind that the "new counties, abolished counties" list ends with La Paz County, Arizona, which was created in 1983.

States with New Counties, Abolished Counties, or Independent Cities since the Census Day of 1 June 1920:

Arizona: one new county
- La Paz County created from Yuma in 1983 (the last county created in the U.S.)

Florida: 13 new counties
- Charlotte County created from DeSoto in 1921
- Dixie County created from Lafayette in 1921
- Glades County created from DeSoto in 1921
- Hardee County created from DeSoto in 1921
- Highlands County created from DeSoto in 1921
- Sarasota County created from Manatee in 1921
- Union County created from Bradford in 1921

- Collier County created from Lee and Monroe in 1923
- Hendry County created from Lee in 1923
- Gilchrist County created from Alachua in 1925
- Gulf County created from Calhoun in 1925
- Indian River County created from St. Lucie in 1925
- Martin County created from Palm Beach and St. Lucie in 1925

Georgia: six new counties; two abolished counties
- Brantley County created from Charlton, Pierce, and Wayne in Nov 1920
- Lamar County created from Monroe and Pike in Nov 1920
- Lanier County created from Berrien, Lowndes, and Clinch effective Nov 1920
- Long County created from Liberty in Nov 1920
- Seminole County created from Decatur and Early in Nov 1920
- Peach County created from Houston and Macon in 1924
- Campbell and Milton counties were abolished in 1932, their areas both annexed to Fulton

Montana: five new counties
- Daniels County created from Valley and Sheridan in 1920
- Golden Valley County created from Musselshell in 1920
- Judith Basin County created from Fergus and Cascade in 1920
- Lake County created from Flathead and Missoula in 1923
- Petroleum County created from Fergus and Garfield in 1924

Nevada: one significant county boundary change
- The indefinite 1861 Washoe eastern boundary was finally defined by range/township in 1924, impacting the adjoining counties of Humboldt and Pershing

New Mexico: four new counties
- Catron County created from Socorro in 1921
- Harding County created from Mora and Union in 1921
- Los Alamos County created from Sandoval and Santa Fe in 1949
- Cibola County created from Valencia in 1981

South Dakota: two abolished counties
- Armstrong County was enumerated with Dewey, 1920-1950, but not officially annexed to Dewey until 1952
- Washington County was abolished and the area annexed to Shannon County in 1943

Texas: one significant county boundary change
- Willacy County migrated south one county in 1921; the area of 1920 Willacy is identical today to Kenedy County, except for a 1.4 mile strip below the southern boundary of Kenedy

Virginia: new independent cities and abolished counties
- Independent cities have existed in Virginia since Williamsburg was chartered in 1722. In 1987, 41 independent cities were outside county boundaries and jurisdictions. Three are now defunct:

1) Manchester, incorporated in 1874 and absorbed into Richmond in 1910
2) South Norfolk, incorporated in 1921 and merged with Norfolk County in 1962 to form the city of Chesapeake
3) Warwick County became the City of Warwick in 1952 and then was absorbed into the city of Newport News in 1957; these changes abolished the counties of Norfolk and Warwick

- Also extinct are Elizabeth City County, which merged with the city of Hampton in 1952, and Princess Anne County, which was consolidated with the city of Virginia Beach in 1962.

City/County Changes Since 1987

Genealogists who expect to be around in 2072 to review the 2000 census in person will find many county changes impacting the place of residence of their ancestors. An excellent review of the many city/county changes can be found at the Wikipedia page: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consolidated_city-county. That article includes a detailed list of city/county consolidations and mergers and county/county mergers.

"The Labyrinth of Cousinhood: Identifying Degrees Of Relationships Through Multiple Generations"

by

Denise R. Larson

While paging through a tome about the history of the Madawaska Territory in Maine and Canada, aka British North America, I encountered several references to Pierre Duperré, a woodsman, pioneer, and all around good guy. Aha! thought I, a hero ancestor of mine. But before I could pencil him into the family lineage, I had to link him to the Duperré branch on my family tree. Little did I know about the tangle of genealogical relationships in which I would become ensnared.

Evidently there's more than one way to calculate cousinhood. There are rectangular-graph cousin and kinship charts. There's a canon law relationship chart shaped like a diamond, and there's a mathematical formula for figuring out degrees of cousinship.

Beyond degrees of cousinship and removal, there are considerations of the double cousin, the half cousin, the step-cousin, and the cousin-in-law. It was sounding more and more like the seating arrangement for a family Christmas dinner.

I followed my Duperré line back to the same generation as Pierre Duperré in the late eighteenth century and found my direct ancestors in Kamouraska, Canada, Pierre's hometown, which was a good sign. The problem was that my ancestors were a bunch of homebodies who stayed in Kamouraska, along the south shore of the St. Lawrence, for a few more generations before moving to the south shore of the St. John. That eliminated Pierre, who established his family along the Madawaska, as a direct ancestor.

Tracing Pierre's pedigree led me to our ancestor in common, but I needed a chart to figure out to what degree we were related, i.e., our consanguinity. A graph-type chart with an increasing number of "greats" along the *x* and *y* axes is called a "cousin table" or an ancestral, progenitor, or relationship chart. The director ancestor who appears in both persons' charts is placed at the junction of the axes. One person follows the *x* axis, the other follows the *y* axis, each stopping at the position the ancestor plays in his or her line, e.g., great-grandfather. Following the row or column from the ancestor's position to the junction of the two gives the degree of relationship, e.g., first cousin, and the degree of removal, e.g., once removed.

The mathematical method calls for counting the number of "greats" and "grands" assigned to the ancestor in common, with each great or grand counting as a 1. The smaller of the two numbers is the degree of cousinship. Pierre's great-grandfather (for a count of 2) was my great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandfather (for a count of 8). Pierre was my second cousin, 2 being the smaller number.

The degree of removal is calculated by subtracting the lesser from the greater number: 8 minus 2 equals 6. Pierre was six times removed.

Pierre as my second cousin six times removed was confirmed by an ancestral chart with *x* and *y* axes. Cyndi's List provides illustrations of several relationship charts at ***http://www.cyndislist.com/cousins/.***

Disappointingly, I can't claim good citizen Pierre Duperré as a direct ancestor, but I can call him Cousin Pierre. It's nice to have a local hero in the family.

Close relationships of the regulated kind

The conquest of Canada by the British Empire in 1759 created a cultural island of French Catholicism in a sea of English Protestantism. This was exacerbated by the arrival of 40,000 United Empire Loyalists at the end of the American Revolution. The silver lining of the situation, genealogically speaking, was that a clergyman of the Catholic Church undertook the heroic task of cataloging the pedigrees of the people of Quebec province and some Acadians, so that men and women of marriageable age could avoid unions of too close a degree of consanguinity (the limits of which were set by the Church), yet still marry within their ethnicity and religion.

The genealogical dictionary produced by the Rev. Cyprien Tanguay (1819-1902) also served to collect and preserve parish registers and civil records. Occasionally it was cited in court cases to settle claims to estates. Tanguay's *Dictionnaire généalogique des familles canadiennes* is still an esteemed genealogical resource for French-Canadian families from 1617 to 1760. The seven-volume reference work is available for free use online through the Bibliotheque et Archives Nationales du Quebec at ***http://bibnum2.banq.qc.ca/bna/dicoGenealogie/.***

For more resources about French Canada, see:

Genealogy at a Glance: French-Canadian Genealogy Research by Denise R. Larson. If you think you might be a descendant of the first generation of French settlers in Quebec, see her book, ***Companions of Champlain: Founding Families of Quebec, 1608-1635. With 2016 Addendum.***

For further reading about consanguinity and the pitfalls of claiming a hero as one's own:

Kinship: It's All Relative, Enlarged Second Edition, by Jackie Smith Arnold includes explanations, descriptions, and methods of calculating degrees of relationship including a relationship chart. There also are chapters on legal issues, such as marriage, names, and wills.

For a lighter look at genealogical entanglements there is: ***The Sunny Side of Genealogy*** by Fonda D. Baselt and Laverne Galeener-Moore's sassy yet insightful ***Collecting Dead Relatives*** and ***Further Undertakings of A Dead Relative Collector***

"Bogus Stories of Military Ancestors Can Confound Family Historians"
by
Richard Hite

[The following article was excerpted from Chapter 7 of Sustainable Genealogy, entitled "Military Service of Ancestors."]

"When I hear of some of the wildly exaggerated claims of the military exploits of my own ancestors and anyone else's, I am reminded of "The Battle of Mayberry" episode of the *Andy Griffith Show*. In one episode, Opie's class was assigned to write an essay about the so-called "Battle of Mayberry" which had involved the early settlers of the town of Mayberry and the Native American population two centuries earlier. Andy and Aunt Bea immediately told Opie about his own ancestor, Colonel Carlton Taylor who, by their account, played a leading role in the battle. Opie then went on to talk to all of the major characters in the town … [who] all told stories about ancestors who held the rank of "Colonel" at the time of the battle. All of them described the settlers winning the battle with only fifty armed men facing 500 Native Americans. Andy, realizing Opie's confusion over the conflicting accounts, took him to visit a local Native American named Tom Strongbow … who told of his own ancestor, Chief Strongbow, leading fifty warriors to a victory over 500 armed settlers. Finally, Andy took Opie to Raleigh, North Carolina, the state capital, to give him an opportunity to look up contemporary accounts of the battle. What Opie found was a newspaper account that told of a dispute that started over a cow accidentally killed by a Native American in Mayberry. Instead of fighting a battle though, fifty settlers and fifty braves settled the dispute by sharing several jugs of liquor and killing some deer to compensate the owner of the cow.

From Private to Major

That whole story is, of course, fictitious but exaggerated accounts of ancestors' military exploits are a dime a dozen in oral history whether "truly oral" or "written oral." One of the most common mistakes is an inflated rank assigned to an ancestor. A likely source of this, particularly for Civil War soldiers, stems from the late 19th and early 20th century habit of referring to elderly veterans of that war as "Colonel" or "Major" – even for those that never rose above the rank of private. This was most common for Confederate veterans, but Union veterans were also referred to by these honorary titles in some instances. It is easy for overeager descendants who hear an ancestor referred to by an honorary rank to jump to the conclusion that he actually did hold such a rank while in the service. Usually, these claims of such high rank are relatively easy to check, especially for Civil War soldiers. Records for soldiers in earlier wars are not so voluminous but there are many, nonetheless. Service records and pension applications give the ranks soldiers achieved and it is not at all unusual to learn that an honorary major never actually rose above the rank of private. In the case of common names, proof (or disproof) may be a bit more of a challenge. A descendant of a private named John Smith will undoubtedly have little trouble finding a colonel or a major with that rank in some regiment from the state their own ancestor served from. In this kind of case, researchers should examine the economic circumstances of the ancestors, before and after the war. Assuming that a man named John Smith, who owned less than fifty dollars' worth of real estate at the time of the 1860 and 1870 census enumerations held the rank of "Colonel" during the Civil War is not a leap of faith I would make.

The General's Right Hand Man…

Sometimes the stories of ancestral military exploits are more specific than an overinflated rank. One of the Pennsylvania German families I descend from is a family named Ickes. In the late 1990s, I was searching for information on them on ***Genforum.com***, which was the primary means of exchanging genealogical information on the Internet at the time. I came across an account posted by a descendant of Nicholas Ickes (1764-1848), the founder of the town of Ickesburg in Perry County, Pennsylvania. Nicholas is not a direct ancestor of mine, but he is related. This descendant noted a family story (which she expressed skepticism about) that Nicholas Ickes had been a right hand man to George Washington and had looked between the logs of the General's cabin to see him kneeling in prayer before a battle.

…Who Only Served Two Months!

This is, of course, a spectacular story. Another family member, however, replied to this message less than a month later. Quoting from Ickes's pension application, she noted that in September 1781, he enlisted in the Continental Army as a substitute for a man named George Evans and marched from Philadelphia County (where he then resided) to Uniontown in Bucks County, Pennsylvania where he was stationed in the garrison and served about two months. His pension application was, in fact, rejected because he did not serve six months.

Clearly the contrast between tradition and documentation here could not be much more stark. The idea that a private who served in the Continental Army for two months became a right hand man to George Washington screams exaggeration. In fact, at the time Nicholas Ickes enlisted in Pennsylvania, Washington was in Yorktown, Virginia, preparing for the siege that became the climactic battle of the war. While Washington did spend the winter of 1781-1782 in Philadelphia, dealing with administrative matters relating to the Continental Army, he was not with the army and so the chances that Nicholas Ickes personally encountered him are virtually nil – and he certainly did not cross the General's path just before a battle. The original poster followed up with a less dramatic version of the original story – a tradition that Nicholas Ickes, while on duty near Washington's headquarters at Valley Forge, peeped through an opening between the boards and saw the General alone on his knees in prayer. This story, while omitting the tradition that Ickes had been a right hand man to Washington, is no more believable. The Continental Army spent the winter of 1777-1778 at Valley Forge and Nicholas Ickes did not enlist until September 1781."

Editor's Note: Confounding stories of military forebears illustrate just one way genealogists can be lead down the primrose path in their research. Mr. Hite's acclaimed new book, ***Sustainable Genealogy: Separating Fact from Fiction in Family Legends*** is full of such cautionary tales.