

Thanks for downloading this free sample, an article published in the October 2018 issue of *Digging History Magazine*, which featured several “spooky” articles. To purchase the entire issue see this link (the cover and table of contents are included at the end of this sample):

https://digging-history.com/store/?model_number=october-2018

I hope you will consider a subscription to *Digging History Magazine*, a bi-monthly digital publication. There are now four affordable subscription options, three of which are automatically recurring until you tell me you’d like to cancel. Details can be found here:

<https://digging-history.com/digging-history-magazine-subscription/>

Be sure and check out the new specially-priced one-year only subscription (non-recurring with no obligation unless you tell me you’d like to continue).

Questions? Please contact me at seh@digging-history.com.

Thanks again,

Sharon Hall
Editor, Publisher, Researcher, Writer and Graphic Designer
Digging History Magazine



It's Time to Rake the Leaves

by Sharon Hall



Having now officially passed into the autumnal equinox, it's time to think about raking up leaves – in our yards and, metaphorically, our family trees.

And, since 2001 when Congress made it official so, October is Family History Month. What better time to do a little “yard work” – genealogically speaking.

Those of us who have accounts at Ancestry.com are familiar with the “shaking leaves” – hints which might help us solve family history mysteries. The word “might” should be emphasized here. Not all hints are equal – some are just leading you down a path to ruin (genealogically speaking).

I manage several trees through my Ancestry account, the majority of them belonging to clients who have engaged my research services. Earlier this year I realized I had let the “leaves pile up” and needed to plow through the hints and see which were useful and which needed to be sent to “Ignore”. As it turned out there were a lot I chose to ignore and send out of my sight.

Anyone who has taken the time to go through Ancestry hints likely does so with a furrowed brow at times, questioning the importance (or lack thereof) of the numerous “vague” records which pop up as hints. Hints like:

Family Data Collection

What exactly is a “Family Data Collection”? Officially, Ancestry defines it as:

The Family Data Collection - Individual Records database was created while

gathering genealogical data for use in the study of human genetics and disease.

So, exactly when was this data collected? It doesn't say. No citation equals questionable reliability, plain and simple. Originally, the collection was considered a unique database consisting of five million genealogical record representing some twenty million names, which “were saved from destruction after being rejected from scientific studies.” Note the word “rejected”.¹

To Ancestry's credit they did mention the possibility of an “absence of cited documentation”, but how many people bother to read the “fine print” and just attach it to their tree without verifying? Rather than see the data destroyed, however, Ancestry purchased the electronic data rights. After those rights were purchased in 2000, Ancestry decided to divvy them up into three separate collections: Births, Marriages and Deaths.

It's not that these records are totally useless (yet, in many cases they are fiction or “fantasy” as someone may have tried to link themselves to some famous person, for instance). They can serve as a starting point to investigate further. If, however, you rely on them as primary sources, you will eventually end up with a nightmare in terms of reliably connecting family lines.



Another consideration in deciding whether to base your research on any records of this type is that other researchers, often casual hobbyists, will copy what you copied and keep passing along potentially incorrect data. Some people think you can just whip through “research” by copying other people's trees. I had to keep from busting out laughing a few years ago when speaking to a nurse at a rehab facility where my dad was staying for a few days.

He had the same surname (Hall) and came from around Vernon, Texas where we do have some family connections. He was potentially a distant cousin. I told him how I had been researching our family history, and he somewhat smugly informed me he had concluded his research – it only took him three weeks! Hahahahaha, I wanted to bust out laughing!

I'm pretty sure I know exactly how his "research" went. Several years ago we purchased an Ancestry membership for my mother and she, unfortunately and unknowingly, did much the same thing. It took me awhile to undo all of that once I became involved. Again, it wasn't that it was ALL wrong – it just needed to be proved with valid data.

In my opinion these "Family Data Collections" which purport to have been gleaned "for use in the study of human genetics and disease" have the potential to be so out-of-date as not to be believed at all in many cases. Scientists are constantly finding new ways to fine-tune DNA analysis. I recently received an email from Ancestry informing me they were updating my ethnicity estimate (I'm now "more Irish" and now 2% Native American), based on new genetic science. Look for an article on this topic in the future.

In regards to these "Family Data Collection" hints, when I was doing a little "leaf-raking" earlier this year I clicked "Ignore" more often than not and put these record types out-of-sight, out-of-mind (although they do remain in the "Ignored" folder).

Millennium File

Even more mysterious than the "Family Data" collections might be the "Millennium File". Ancestry lists the source of this database as Heritage Consulting, a well-known and reputable Salt Lake City research firm who performs most, if not all,

their research at the nearby Family History Library.

Originally, the Millennium File was a database created by the Institute of Family Research which long ago dissolved into five different research firms. The database was created in order to track records of its clients and the results of their research.

It is a significant database of over 880,000 "linked family records, with lineages from throughout the world, including colonial America, the British Isles, Switzerland, and Germany. Many of these lineages extend back to nobility and renowned historical figures. In fact, one of the things the Millennium File focuses on is linking to European nobility and royalty."

Good to know, but is this a reliable database upon which to base proof of one's ancestry? Ancestry suggests a good use of this particular database is assisting in identifying what's called a "gateway ancestor", the early American immigrant "identified as having roots in British or European nobility." Despite the size of this database, it includes only about 300 so-called "gateway ancestors" with proven ties to nobility or royalty.²

Google "millennium file" and you'll find a lot of negativity regarding this database. For example, in 2015 the following conversation took place on a *Who Do You Think You Are? Magazine* forum:

During my researches on the "Ancestry" site I have found information into the Mid 17C, very exciting. This information has come from the Millenium [sic] File, a source I am not familiar with. I know that primary sources i.e. parish registers are the preferred source but this information seems to come from Parish register transcriptions anyway.

My question is can anyone put my mind at rest as to the validity and accuracy of this

source? it seems to originate from the LDS archive.

Bern

“Bern” seems to have been someone just starting out on his ancestry research journey and curious to know if the Millennium File was a good source, because it “seemed” the information had been extracted directly from parish registers. For a “newbie” it was a good and honest question.

The first reply to Bern’s question cautioned (great caution) that, as a resource, the Millennium File should be equated along the lines of another “vague” source – “One World Tree”.

However, it should be pointed out that Ancestry officially shut down this source in 2013 and replaced it with “Family Trees”. According to the Ancestor Search web site, it is “a much improved database that contains millions of family trees submitted to Ancestry by users.”⁴ If, while raking your Ancestry leaves, you find a reference to One World Tree you might want to review it and determine whether it is a valid source.

From there the comments went downhill:

The dreadful habit that many of these concocted secondary sources and research fall into is, in the research part, to assume “Same name, same person”. And to add in estimated events guessed from people’s ages. I have no idea how much of the Millennium File is which, but rest assured that there are no magic sources that you’re missing.

Ah, the millennium file, when I first began my research and was extremely inexperienced at what I was doing. I made the mistake of taking these god awful things as verbatim. It didn’t take long for me to see that these things have been used to further people’s fantasies in a genealogical sense. I quickly found them infuriating. I

recall seeing some that had evidently been doctored and were placing nobility from Britain as having been born in American states at a time when it had barely even been discovered.

Bern thanked those responding “for their sobering replies” as he “half suspected” the Millennium File should be treated as a hint and certainly not proof of anything. Good for Bern – at least he asked and probably saved himself a lot of headaches down the research road.

Some time ago, someone starting a new thread at a community forum at Family Search began with this plea:

Please get rid of Milleniul [sic] file and International marriages as they are bogus...

There is not a single proof in any of these documents other than they state they use all of the pedigrees out of people [sic] own submitted data? Since when is a pedigree a true source of record? All I have to say on the matter is those files may be a legitimate source of the ‘peoples’ [sic] network, but they are not true sources. I don’t understand why the church has added those or let people add those to the lines as a source. Its [sic] like saying the best friend down the street knows my family better than me.⁵

Another person, perhaps the moderator, asked for examples and other comments put forth similar views. One agreed that the Millennium File and the U.S. and International Marriage Records, 1560-1900 collections were both poor sources. The researcher noted that whenever he found those attached to his tree he detached them. The moderator, however, disagreed and said they should not be detached. Basically, a hint is a hint, he called them “a secondary derivative source of unknown quality.”

Excusez moi ... but, I don't think I want to rely on "a secondary derivative source of unknown quality" – do you? If I choose to even consider such a record, I better be doing a little extra digging to verify it! Unfortunately, there are just too many gullible and impatient people who don't know any better, and like the nurse just want to "get it done and over with."

And now for one of my favorite genealogical "pet peeves": Global and/or "Virtual" Find-A-Grave "records". I put records in quotes for a reason because oftentimes I seriously wonder are these really records or just someone's best (or worst!) guess as to where someone was buried, or when and where they were born and died.

The Ancestry database is officially entitled "Global, Find A Grave Index for Burials at Sea and other Select Burial Locations, 1300s-Current". As the title implies the records for this database are gleaned from the Find-A-Grave web site, which purports to be a "virtual cemetery experience".

The web site was started in 1995 by Jim Tipton so he could share his hobby of visiting cemeteries where famous people had been buried. People began visiting the site and decided, "hey, my ancestor may not have been famous but I want to post my own pictures for posterity's sake." The site now has more than 110 million memorials.

Again, it's not that the information found there is necessarily unreliable. Some people take the courtesy of providing source information, even if it's just an informal reference. The ones that trouble me are those which are so vague as not to be believed. Without any type of source, I am somewhat leery of any entry which does not include a grave marker which I can read or deemed to have been reliably transcribed by the person posting a picture.

One example of someone's misguided posting was one I came across while

researching an article for my local genealogical society's newsletter (which, at the time, I was editing and writing many of the articles). I wrote (regarding the demise of a recently-released inmate of the Colorado Insane Asylum):

One particular case, that of William Arundale, caught my eye. It was a sad story. William was on his way home to Hot Sulphur Springs after being released from the Pueblo hospital when he was crushed by a train at Elk Creek. Authorities believed he had relapsed and committed suicide. His wife was sure it was an accident.

His remains were to be interred at Mount Olivet in Jefferson County. Let's say William Arundale was your ancestor and you knew he lived in Hot Sulphur Springs (Grand County, Colorado) and you wanted to find his grave. Many people would automatically go to Find-A-Grave and look up "William Arundale" in Grand County. And, you would find an entry for William Arundale – your William Arundale (sort of) – with only the notation "killed by a train" and an unknown birth and death date.

Had you searched all counties in Colorado for "Arundale" you would find two named William Arundale in Mount Olivet, one of them being your ancestor (1867-1900). Someone has apparently entered a "virtual cemetery" entry (or a wild guess!) for William Arundale in Hot Sulphur Springs without adequately researching his demise.⁶

These are but a few of the "vague" records I constantly come across, and which most of the time require further research. Does your tree, like mine, need a good raking? Like I always say, "genealogy research, at least the serious kind, is not for the faint of heart!" As the saying goes . . . *caveat investigator*.

DIGGING HISTORY

OCTOBER 2018

THE MAGAZINE

Sister Amy's Murder Factory

American Poltergeist
(and other strange goings-on)

It's time to rake the leaves



Are you one of THOSE
kind of people?

Those Dang Saucers Appear Everywhere!

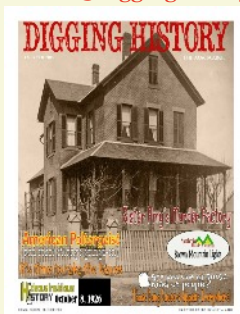
**Hideous Insidious
HISTORY** October 8, 1926

DIGGING HISTORY

A monthly publication of Digging History Media

Web Site: www.digginghistorymag.com

Contact Us: seh@digginghistorymag.com



ON THE COVER:
Amy Archer-Gilligan Home

IN THIS ISSUE



American Poltergeist (and other strange goings-on)

1



Sister Amy's Murder Factory

11



Brown Mountain Lights: Appalachia's Historical Mystery

28



BOOK CORNER: May I Recommend . . .

33



**FAMILY HISTORY TOOLBOX: Essential Tools
for the Successful Family Researcher**

34



It's Time to Rake the Leaves

35



Are you one of THOSE kind of people?

39



Those Dang Saucers Appear Everywhere!

42



Hideous Insidious History: October 8, 1926

49

GRAVE HEADLINES

55



THE DASH: Joseph Faubion, The Man Who Died Twice

57



BIBLIOGRAPHY and Photo Credits

59