



February 15, 2024

This newsletter may interest those related to persons related directly or indirectly to Grace and Clifford Retson. My genealogy website is located at <http://www.retson.ca/retsongeneology.html>

Retson Virtual Cemetery Continued

In October, I commenced a project which I called the Retson Virtual Cemetery (<https://www.retson.ca/retsonvirtualcemetery.pdf>) This project provides another way of accessing our various ancestors as does the various family root profiles which one can access from <https://www.retson.ca/retsongeneology.html> (See Left side for connection to various family roots). The original purpose of the virtual cemetery focused on the final resting spots of our ancestors. Early in the project I found that, in addition to looking to my own data base to find individuals siblings of direct ancestors, I found www.wikitree.com database very useful for adding siblings. I started to add the individual links of ancestors to the virtual cemetery file. This has greatly increased the workload to the project but also increased the value of the project.

The first benefit of adding the wikitree links was the increase in the number of discovered collateral ancestors. Collateral ancestors are siblings of direct ancestors. The first generation of siblings (i.e. siblings of parents) add all uncles and aunts. The successive generation of siblings add great uncles and great aunts. Children of siblings are nephews and nieces. These additional collateral ancestors, which were not yet in my database, provide additional avenues for researching ancestors. Each individual may provide additional information on other ancestors which are referenced in their birth, marriage, and death records (including obituaries) as well local histories.

The second benefit is the correction of errors. As I continued with the project, I realized it is not always easy to determine what is a mistake and what is not. The word incorrectly is spelled incorrectly in every dictionary. But that is not a mistake. In fact, the very consistency of the spelling “incorrectly” is confirmation of its validity.

When you follow a link on wikitree or find-a-grave you may find that the information that I provide may not always agree with each other or may differ from the information that I provide in the virtual file. Is the mistake mine, or the author of one, or both the entry links?

Consider the information concerning my 3rd great grandfather William Atkinson. His headstone gives his birth year carved in stone as 1785. This birth year in his memorial located in Find-A-Grave at <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/101407264/william-atkinson>



also gives his birth as 1785. His birth on wikitree located at <https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Atkinson-11614> gives his birth as 1791 with an explanation on the alternative 1785 date.

This is an example of a derivative error, whether the error is a transcription error or simple misinformation held by the informer of the record. Original information is more likely to be accurate since it was experienced by the original record maker and recorded without a length of time which might be affected by memory.

We are not aware of who informed the carver as to what year to carve on the stone. However, assuming that William Atkinson was born in the Township of Money, Kilmore Parish, County Armagh, Ireland in either 1785 or 1791 it is unlikely that the informer had any personal knowledge of his birth year.

The Find-A-Grave entry was originally created by Patricia Casjens in 2012 and is currently maintained by "FamFinders" who have ancestors Hollistons who married several Atkinsons. I have never communicated with any of these individuals but am unaware of any personal information they have regarding his birth year other than the headstone.

The author of the Wikitree entry is myself and I have no personal knowledge of his birth year. I initially relied on the headstone evidence until I found contradicting evidence about the birth year from 1851 and 1861 census data and could not find any William Atkinson from County Armagh, Ireland born in 1785 but did find one from the Money Township who fit the description in other regards.

Sometimes comments in the entry links indicate that others have identified the errors, and they simply have not been corrected by the authors. When I become aware of my errors I attempt to correct them. Other times I attempt to give an explanation as to differences.

Another case of conflicting evidence concerns Alice, the wife of John Hoar John Hoar
<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/142411451/john-hoar>
<https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Hoar-9>

Birth about 1622 in Gloucester, Gloucestershire, England

Death 2 Apr 1704 at about age 82 in Concord, Middlesex, Province of Massachusetts Bay

Wife Alice (Unknown) Hoar — married 1645 in Concord, Middlesex, Massachusetts

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/142411520/alice-hoar>
<https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Unknown-356354>

Alice Unknown

Birth about 1620 in England

Death about 5 Jun 1696 at about age 76 in Concord, Middlesex, Province of Massachusetts Bay

Husband John Hoar — married 1645 in Concord, Middlesex, Massachusetts

My original research on John Hoar was conducted at the Colchester Historical Society located in the Colchester Museum 29 Young Street at which time I reviewed the Hoar (e) file and discovered the book by William S. Hoar, *By Way of New England* (I subsequently received a complimentary copy from the author). Over the years I have found various websites and manuscripts and books that indicate the wife was Alice Lisle. I was very reluctant to accept this conclusion due to the excitement of being connected to both the drafter of King Charles 1 execution order and his father who sat as a Judge in the hearing but have not found any to contradict the findings located at <https://www.wikitree.com/g2g/187148/is-there-any-evidence-for-the-lname-of-john-hoars-wife-alice> .

I continue to add collaterals as well as review other examples of conflicting data between my findings and others. There are mistakes from time to time. There are also mistakes when derivative records such as books are

relied on and subsequently prove incorrect. Based on new research findings I have to change my records. The tentative file will become more reliable as questionable records are challenged. Therefore, I welcome all inquiries and corrections about my work on this project.

There are advantages of these websites (Wikitree and Find-a Grave). The first is that much of the information is outside of paywalls such as found at Ancestry.com, Find-My Past and My Heritage and New England Historical Genealogical Society. The second is that anyone can edit the entries. This is particularly valuable as others can help in your research. For examples If you look at <https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Jenkins-17222> all entries were added by an individual who was interested in the Nova Scotia Agriculture College and its past principals. Source link 3 takes you to <https://www.dal.ca/faculty/agriculture/about/history/principals-presidents-biographies.html> and an excellent biography of William Angus Jenkins. But the individual did not only stop there but went on to add a number of his ancestors which can be followed clicking on William Angus Jenkins mother's name.

Bibliographies in addition to proving sources can be quite lengthy such as those at <https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Retson-8> or <https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Cooke-36> (my 10th great grandfather). These bibliographies may be edited by anyone unless protected by Wikitree who assign certain restrictions on individuals to group managers such as The Mayflower passengers or Great Migration Project managers. For these individuals, edits must be made through managers. A very brief course and successful test is required for pre 1700 entries to improve quality for earlier entries.

Identity – What was his occupation.

A common problem in genealogy research is to determine if two same named individuals are the same or different people. To do so we examine the two same named individuals and attempt to place them in time and place. In addition to time and place we examine descriptive facts about both individuals. In the abstract, an individual is a collection of facts associated with a name: birthdate, birthplace, father, mother, spouse, marriage date, marriage place), children, children's birth date and place, death date, death place, religion, occupation, military record, residence at various places or times and on and on. Each one of these facts contributes to making up the identity of each individual. If enough of these facts are identical we assume that the two individuals are one and the same person, otherwise we have two different individuals. Once we have identified that the two same-named persons are one and the same we take the facts attributed to the two and meld them together to enlarge the description of the individual.

An individual's occupation is often regarded as one of the individual's most important characteristics. However, an individual may have more than one occupation during his lifetime. He may start off as a mole-catcher, then become a farmer, then a butcher and then be described as retired. Thus, one named individual in a community who is described as a mole catcher in one community at age 25 might be the same individual as another named individual who is described as farmer or a butcher in a nearby community at age 35. Less likely than if one of the individuals is described as a Doctor or lawyer.

We may speculate as to what extent any of the facts attached to an individual play in the individual's occupation. Time and place obviously are important factors. An individual living in a Welsh mining town as described in How Green was MY Valley is more likely to become a miner than a molecatcher. An individual born in 2024 is more likely to be in a computer related field than an individual born a century earlier. Sex is less determinative of one's occupation than in an earlier period of history. The father's or mother's occupation and values may play an important role either directly or indirectly. A parent who values education is likely to encourage their children to acquire the necessary education necessary to acquire certain occupations.

Ancestor's Religion

Religion may also be a significant distinguishing characteristic that helps in distinguishing an individual's identity post the Protestant Reformation. Prior to governments passing laws requiring registration of birth, marriage and death records of the church was the predominant repositories for such records.

One of the problems in research in early catholic records was the use of Latin in the church. The amount of Latin that you require as a genealogist researching 1600s can be mastered in a week along with the requirement of a manuscript or book for reference. A week in one of my genealogy courses called Palaeography: Reading & Understanding Historical Documents provided all that I have ever required. Even before the course, I had figured out common Latin names such as Danielus, Davidus, Edmundus, Francicus, Georgius, Henricus Jacobus, Johannes, Matthaues, Nicholaus and Richarus which had been passed down to our family for the next five hundred years. Numbers and dates were a bit more difficult as were various family relationships (for example, father, mother, son, daughter, etc. The Palaeography course did provide an excellent background to understand the culture and social milieu of the period, but this may not be of interest to anyone other than genealogists.

Religion did play an important part in the lives of our ancestors – much more than I realized until digging into detail in earlier generations. Religion – or more particularly, freedom from religious persecution played the most important role in explaining the migration of our ancestors to the new world. [More on this in subsequent newsletters.] Shortly after the arrival of Europeans in the Americas, the unity of western Christianity was shattered by the Protestant Reformation. After the Protestant Reformation Protestantism consolidated its positions in northern Germany, Scandinavia, Holland, Scotland, and England. France, Southern Germany, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Austria, Hungary, Poland, and Ireland remained catholic. Protestantism soon split into four branches: Lutherans divided between Zwinglians and Calvinist (Presbyterian). England formed Anglican communions. Finally, a fourth branch known as Independent or radical further divided into various branches (Baptist, Methodist etc.) All our relatives prior to Henry VIII were Catholic.

England officially became non-Catholic during the reign of King Henry VIII. The break with the Roman papacy and the establishment of an independent Church of England occurred during his reign (1509–47). The Act of Supremacy 1534 declared the English crown to be “the only supreme head on earth of the Church in England” in place of the Pope. The Catholic Mass became illegal in England in 1559, under Queen Elizabeth I's Act of Uniformity. The Recusancy Acts, legally obligating English citizens to adhere to Anglicanism, date from Elizabeth's reign. The Bill of Rights of 1689, Parliament declared that no future monarch could be a Catholic or be married to a Catholic. This provision was reaffirmed in the 1701 Act of Settlement.

I have not done extensive research prior to the end of the reign of Elizabeth I and because of this can speak very definitively of the relationship of our catholic ancestors to their religion. Since 1600 the only Catholics among our ancestors were the Cliffords from Cork County Ireland and his wife's family in Nova Scotia. John Clifford was baptized 11 Apr 1803 at St Mary's Church in Cork City, Cork, Ireland. He emigrated to Nova Scotia in 1826 and married Alice Kennedy on 20 Sep 1829 at Lady of Mount Carmel, Prospect Church in Nova Scotia. She and her parents, John and Elizabeth Kenedy were also Catholic. It is uncertain how devoted John was to his religion and his wife was quite unusual as a Catholic for her times in that she read the bible to her children. None of the six children remained catholic in their adult years choosing to adopt their spouse's religion.

This newsletter was sent to individuals who have expressed an interest in this genealogy at some time. If you do not wish to receive future updates, please email me at jretson@shaw.ca and indicate so.