



January 15, 2024

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

## **Genealogy Goals for 2024**

The new year has arrived and as I am encouraged to think about Genealogy goals for the year. I will continue to work on projects from the past year such as the Virtual Retson Genealogy, updating profiles and extracting tips from online databases. I would like to add some new projects as well. Some ideas I have in mind to work on (1) Ancestor's occupations (2) Ancestor's religions (3) examination of early ancestors in the war known as King Phillip's war in the 1600s in New England and at least getting a start on a "Philosophy" or "Religion" of genealogy. I will also continue to work on new technology such as the use of Artificial Intelligence in Genealogy and at least start the last course leading to my diploma in Genealogy.

## **Artificial Intelligence (AI)**

The interests of the public in AI during the past few years has been the addition of natural language results but it has been around since Alan Turing work which eventually led to the use of computers. While the interest has turned to natural language, genealogy software has been adding more tools which might be regarded as artificial intelligence.

I use three different genealogy software packages and different subscriptions to online databases to do my genealogy research both on my family and local genealogy club in Kenora. I started with family tree to record data in digital form and after years of working with the databases maintained by the Mormon Church bought a subscription to their offshoot service called ancestry. I still uses these two sources as my principal search engine and record keeping. After retirement in 2013 and my first DNA test in 2015 I also added Legacy Tree and Roots Magic for software and eventually two additional databases, Find My Past and My Heritage subscriptions. Legacy was great in finding death records and Roots Magic was great in de-aggregating people and then re-aggregating them into categories.

Let me explain this later concept. A particular ancestor is a beautiful specimen in all their glory and what is most important about them is that they contribute DNA which in its disassembled and reassembled form eventually produced me and what entitled me to claim to be a descendant. But in an abstract was at looking at each individual, the individual is a collection of facts associated with a name (Which might also be considered a fact. The individual was born at a specific time and place (Birthdate, Birthplace); had a natural father and mother (Father, Mother); may have married a particular spouse (Spouse) at a specific time and place (Marriage date, Marriage Place); may have had children (Children, Children's Birth Date and Place); died (or will die) at a specific time and place (Death Date, Death Place); had a specific religion (Religion), possible occupation (Occupation), may have served in a war (Military); lived at various places at certain times (Residence) and has DNA matches with many other individuals, (DNA Matches) and on and on. Each one of these facts contributes to making up the identity of the individual.

We may speculate as to what extent any of these factors played a part in the individual's life. For example, a person's sex and residence may contribute significantly to a person's occupation: 5 successive generations of male Retson direct ancestors in Northern England and Scotland 1730-1880s were molecatchers. Not one female

ancestor during that period, nor any direct ancestor subsequent to that period were molecatchers. Prior to my current generation, almost every direct ancestor and their siblings were associated with occupations having to do with agriculture, whereas in mine and succeeding generations none were. To make such generalizations, one must collect the occupations of all such ancestors (de-aggregation) and then divide them into different categories of occupations (re-aggregation) such as Agriculture, Medical, Business, Educators, Social Services, Transportation, etc. Similarly, prior to 1600 all my ancestors were Catholic or Anglican. During that century and thereafter membership in these two groups declined until to this day they represent a very small percentage minority. In Genealogy meeting after meeting, I am surprised as to how consistent generations of each member over the past 500 years on these two variables.

One of my goals for the past year was the creation of a Virtual Cemetery for ancestors. I wished to find the graves of as many of our direct ancestors as I could. As I commenced this project I found that quite often I would find the siblings of direct ancestors and decided to add them as well. In the process of this project, I was moved by many deaths and the discoveries of siblings who died young and were forgotten by succeeding generations. So moved I set about attempting to write a poem that would reflect my sentiments. Not being much of a poet I enlisted the use of Artificial Intelligence using Bing from Microsoft. I learned from my daughter Julia in Australia if you don't know how to use some new technology "Google it" and as they say I was off to the races.

"If at first you don't succeed... continue to you do." And so, I did. I found that the art of succeeding was exactly that. I continued with succeeding complicated prompts until I got the poem I published last month. See

I spent so much time determining the right prompts that I thought I should be able to meet the copyright threshold of creativity. To test for originality, I used AI to identify the source of my poem. The response:

I searched the web for the poem you provided, but I could not find any source that matches it exactly. It seems to be an original poem by an unknown author. The closest match I found was a poem titled "Gone But Not Forgotten" by Kelly Roper, which has a similar theme and structure, but different words and rhymes. Perhaps the poem you have is inspired by or adapted from that poem, or it is a coincidence that they are similar.

I looked up that poem and it doesn't in my opinion resemble it in any way other than the use of the word "Forgotten" in the title and I had given the title of the poem in my prompt. Hence I think I am entitled to claim copyright.

I then went on to explore what was AI and how could I use it in genealogy. Artificial Intelligence is anything that resembles human intelligence that is produced with the aid of machines or software, as opposed to the intelligence of humans or animals. To solve problems, AI has adapted and integrated a wide range of problem-solving techniques, including search, mathematical optimization, formal logic, artificial neural networks, and methods based on statistics, operations research, and economics as well as drawing upon psychology, linguistics, philosophy, neuroscience and other fields.

Natural Language processing uses different models. I found that AI in Bing at <https://www.bing.com/?/ai> served my initial purposes. I understand a much more improved service is available at OpenAI at <https://chat.openai.com/> for \$20US per month. I have not yet upgraded.

MODEL	RUNS CODE	SEE IMAGES	READS FILES	INTERNET CONNECTION	PERSONALITY	WHAT IS IT	WHEN TO USE IT
ChatGPT/ GPT-3.5				No	Neutral, bland	This is the free version of ChatGPT that came out in November. It is very fast and pretty solid at writing and coding tasks.	It is fast and cheap and capable, but other models are now better. Also, it is not connected to the internet, so don't use it like a search engine.
ChatGPT/ GPT-4		Soon		No	Helpful, a little preachy	Currently available to paying customers. The most powerful LLM for most purposes. Does a lot.	Better at everything (writing, coding, summarizing) than GPT-3.5 Still not connected to the internet.
ChatGPT/ Code Interpreter/ Plugins	Yes		Yes	Limited	Helpful sometimes witty	Adds new capabilities to ChatGPT. Plugins and web browsing still have rough edges. Code Interpreter lets the AI run Python code & work with files.	Code Interpreter is great for working with data of all sorts, and is the most generally impressive AI implementation so far. Plugins are generally not that useful, yet. The web browsing is being updated.
Bing (Uses GPT-4 in creative & precise modes)		Yes	Yes	Yes	Friendly but also somewhat insane	Connected to the internet. It is GPT-4 with a grab-bag of powerful features. The weirdest model. Creative mode lets you use GPT-4 and is free.	Does a remarkably wide range of stuff, from working as a browser companion to creating art. Is connected to the internet. Has a strong, weird personality.
Bard	Yes	Yes		Yes	None	Bard is a name for a variety of models used by Google. Current offerings are weak, but improving over time	This should be your last choice of AIs for now, but recent updates show promise. High levels of hallucination.
Claude 2			Yes	No	Pleasant when not scolding	Almost as powerful as GPT-4, but built to be "safer" and more pleasant to use. Has 100k context window - enough "memory" to hold a book.	Terrific on working with large documents, due to its extended context window and ability to upload content. It is very new so it is unclear how it stacks up.

<https://www.oneusefulthing.org/p/how-to-use-ai-to-do-stuff-an-opinionated-as-of-Summer-2023-oneusefulthing.org>

I started by asking AI about the possible uses of ChatGPT.

The response was as follows:

ChatGPT can be a useful tool in genealogy in various ways. Here are some ways in which it can be applied:

**Research Assistance:** ChatGPT can help genealogists by providing information about historical events, cultures, and geographical locations. You can ask it about specific time periods, places, or even the significance of certain surnames. This can aid in contextualizing the lives of your ancestors.

**Writing and Documentation:** Use ChatGPT to assist in writing biographies, family histories, or documenting your genealogical research. It can help you articulate details, organize information, and suggest engaging ways to present your findings.

**Problem Solving:** If you encounter roadblocks or have gaps in your genealogical research, ChatGPT can assist in brainstorming ideas, suggesting alternative research paths, or helping you interpret historical records and documents.

**Language Translation:** If your ancestors came from different regions with different languages, ChatGPT can assist with translation. It may not be perfect, but it can help you get the gist of documents written in languages you're not familiar with.

**Record Interpretation:** ChatGPT can assist in interpreting old handwriting or deciphering challenging documents. You can describe the document or provide a snippet, and it can offer suggestions on what the text might mean.

**Interview Simulation:** If you have limited information about a relative, ChatGPT can simulate an interview. Describe what you know about the person and ask questions as if you were interviewing them. The responses can help you think about what information you might still need to find.

**Collaboration and Networking:** ChatGPT can assist in crafting emails or messages when reaching out to potential relatives or genealogy experts. It can help you draft clear, concise, and polite inquiries.

**Education and Learning:** Use ChatGPT to learn more about genealogical research methods, best practices, and the latest tools and resources available. It can provide information on how to use DNA testing for genealogy, tips for organizing your research, and more.

Remember that while ChatGPT can be a helpful tool, it's important to verify its suggestions and information through reliable genealogical sources. Additionally, always respect privacy and ethical considerations when dealing with sensitive family information.

During the past 2 months I have sought out examples of each one of these uses and in January I gave a presentation on the uses of AI in genealogy to the local genealogy club. There is nothing like teaching a subject to learn about the subject.

AI might appear to be magic and something to fear. The returns from Artificial Intelligence will increase exponentially in the next few years. It should not be feared but rather embraced as one more element in the inevitable step of increasing technology. That technology can be used to make life more enjoyable .

Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good. Before you can be good, you have to be bad. Before you can be bad you have to start. Enjoy technology. Play with it.

Some useful links:

<https://twitter.com/emollick>

and 5 videos

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLwRdpYzPkn302\\_rL5RrXvQE8j0jLP02j](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLwRdpYzPkn302_rL5RrXvQE8j0jLP02j)

<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/bing?form=MG0AUO&OCID=MG0AUO#faq>

<https://www.gatesnotes.com/> Particular articles on AI found under Heading *ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE*

<https://twitter.com/YLECUN> Full of witty comments and social analysis in bit size comments

<https://blog.myheritage.com/2023/12/introducing-ai-record-finder-the-worlds-first-ai-chat-based-search-engine-for-historical-records/>

<https://blog.myheritage.com/2023/12/introducing-ai-biographer-create-a-wikipedia-like-biography-for-any-ancestor-using-ai-enriched-with-historical-context/>

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](mailto:jretson@shaw.ca) and indicate so.