



ROUTES TO ROOTS NEWSLETTER

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**Summer is here
at last!**

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Fictitious Family Trees

Many of the databases you routinely visit searching for your family genealogy contain information that has been contributed by the general public. Sadly, not every one is conscientious in their source checking and many don't care that they are contributing illogical and/or inaccurate data to the various online databases. Sometimes the data is simply a fairly tale. For example, it would not be unusual to find claims of a birth for a child of English roots that was born in a locale, at a time when only native peoples inhabited the area. There are thousands of bogus entries that, at first glance, seem plausible. Some people will actually believe the information and then reproduce it within their own family tree databases which they will then share with other family members.

Fictitious family histories are not new. They have existed for centuries. The difference now is how quickly this erroneous data is replicated on the internet and it can be found on any of the online databases, big or small. These same databases, along with the bogus genealogies, will also provide high quality genealogies that have been created by experienced genealogists and will be well sourced and documented.

When you are conducting your family research, always consider the source. Any time you are looking at data on an online site, ask yourself where the information came from and how has it been proven. If we all take a little extra time to produce our family histories we can ensure that we are leaving a true accounting for our future generations.

Is Your Genealogy Database Insane?

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Information about the newsletter is available at <http://www.eogn.com>.

I'd like to make a bet with every reader of this newsletter: I'll bet five bucks that you have errors in your genealogy database. Keep in mind that I am not a gambler; I only bet on "sure things." In this case, I am sure that I could win at least 90% of the bets, guaranteeing that I could then afford a vacation on some sun-drenched tropical isle.

I get to see a lot of genealogy databases and a lot of online genealogy information. Almost all of the data I see has errors. Luckily, many of these errors are easy to find with just a bit of electronic assistance from your computer.

I am not talking about subtle errors that require extensive genealogy research to resolve. Instead, I am referring to obvious errors. They can be called "crazy errors:" claims of mothers giving birth at the age of three, men fathering children at the age of 85, children being born before their parents' births, and other such "facts" that defy logic.

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Not all of these errors are caused by sloppy genealogy research. They can be simple typo errors. For instance, I suffer from a disease that I call "dyslexia of the keyboard." While I know how to spell most English words and almost always know the correct dates when I am entering data into my favorite genealogy program, what appears on my computer screen often has two or more keystrokes reversed! The most used key on my keyboard is BACKSPACE! Yes, I have created silly errors in my genealogy database in times past, and I am a bit embarrassed at how long it took me to discover and correct those errors. Looking at other genealogy databases, it looks like I have plenty of company!

Most of these errors can be identified within a very few minutes. The only complexity involved in checking your data is the number of facts involved. If you have 1,000 people in your database, then you probably have at least 10,000 facts.

You do not need to manually look through your database of 10,000 or more facts in search of each and every error. Most of today's genealogy programs will do that for you. Most programs have a "sanity check" or some similarly-named "search for obvious errors" function that will find the more flagrant problems in your data.

The name used will vary from one genealogy program to another. In some programs, it may be called a "Possible Problems" report while another may say a "Data Errors" report and still another might have a "Verify the Database" report. One program refers to a "Potential Problems" report, and another contains a "Problem List." Whatever the terminology, almost all of today's genealogy programs have the capability to search the database looking for obvious errors.

Of course, you do have to stop and verify each error manually. For instance, one program I know of defaults to looking for young women who supposedly gave birth before the age of sixteen years. That may be an indication of potential errors for some but anyone with French-Canadian ancestry can find many legitimate records of mothers being younger than sixteen when giving birth. One of them would be my French-Canadian grandmother who personally told me about giving birth at fifteen. Such events were common amongst French-Canadians and my database contains many entries for new mothers aged fifteen and a few who were even younger.

Whatever program you use, take a look at its "sanity report." Some programs allow the user to adjust the parameters. Before I run the "sanity report" on my database that contains hundreds of records of French-Canadian births, marriages, and deaths, I have to adjust the parameter for women giving birth to be age thirteen or younger. You may have to do something similar for your database, depending upon the habits of your ancestors.

Before you embarrass yourself by publishing erroneous data or by sharing it with others, I would strongly suggest that you run a "sanity check" on your database. You will be glad that you did.

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