

WHERE WILL YOUR RESEARCH TAKE YOU IN 2001?

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For many genealogists (including myself) the typical response to “Where will your research take you in 2001?” would be “hither, thither, and yon.” Our research turns toward the location of the next national conference or family vacation. We put our current research aside to prepare for the big trip . . . until we get an e-mail from a cousin asking who our records have as the eldest child of great-grandpa Jones or until we spy a long-awaited book of deed abstracts on the “new books” shelf at the library.

As a research technique, “hither, thither, and yon” is near the bottom of the list. It is rarely efficient or effective. A somewhat belated New Year’s resolution might be in order. It is time to get focused. But on what? To make an intelligent decision about where to go, it is best to begin by looking at where we’ve been. I begin by reviewing the seven-generation paternal and maternal pedigree charts that hang in my hallway (opposite the bathroom door, thereby causing an occasional traffic jam at parties with genealogists on the guest list).

The first thing I notice is that some of the dates aren’t filled in, even though I now know them. Maybe that should be my goal—to update my pedigree and order one of those giant charts I saw plotted at the FGS Conference in Salt Lake City. No, I want to find more people before I buy something so permanent; I’ll stick with my hall charts and the worn, folded pedigree in my research kit. But maybe that is a goal for *you*: to create a consolidated chart for show or for a research tool.

An article by Michael Neill in this newsletter back in October prompted me to look at those same charts for my shortest lines. I have at least a given name back through the sixth generation, but the seventh is almost half blank! So many research opportunities! A closer look shows, however, that with two exceptions those blanks are foreign lines. My goal upon beginning genealogy was to focus on my ancestry back to the immigrants, so I will ignore foreign lines for now. One of the holes is an Illinois line with a common surname. Not a good research prospect. The other is a Virginia female with a less common surname. A good prospect, and I will be in Virginia teaching this summer. *Very* tempting. Have you considered focusing on one of *your* shortest lines?

Before rushing upstairs to pull the 2-inch stack of photocopied, but unanalyzed, paper out of the file cabinet and head for the library, I make myself continue my perusal of the charts. I spot the surname I worked on two years ago on my vacation. I planned to compile the family from the immigrant to the seventh generation in hopes that by process of elimination I could find a place for my John. No, I don’t want to start on another big project until I tie up some loose ends elsewhere. But *you* might think that 2001 is the perfect year to begin such a focus.

Oh, dear. Here’s the surname where I straightened out the swapped cousins on my vacation last spring—the one I wrote about in “I Hate Leftovers” in this newsletter. The problem is that I didn’t write up and publish the research, so the descendants don’t know about the switch. Yep, that one goes in the “must do” stack. Does *your* chart contain any discoveries that you promised to document and disseminate?

And then there’s the sketch I’m working on with a cousin for a New England compilation. That’s on the top of the “must do” stack, since the deadline is now.

More and more names leap out at me—families I’ve researched extensively, but hit dead ends or grown bored with. The problem is that my files are in a mess, and I never really wrapped up a narrative or report of the work. I retrieve pen and paper so I can start a list. There are several that I (optimistically) think I could probably finish fairly quickly. How many of your families did *you* retire to the file cabinet before writing their stories?

I have some families that I’m sure I could have a breakthrough on if I carefully reviewed all the paper in the files, compiled a status report, and tackled the problem anew. *You* probably have similar families.

Writing seems to be the greatest “undone” task. We say we’re going to transcribe great-grandma’s letters, write an article, compile a biography of an immigrant ancestor, or . . . My problem is that I find research, as we used to say, “lots more funner” than writing. My list is growing, is yours?

So, what are your research goals for 2001?

- updating and printing your pedigree chart
- working on your shortest line
- beginning a major research project
- reporting on a solution to a tricky problem
- writing a closure report
- reviving an old problem from scratch
- completing a writing project

Are they *all* on the list? It’s time to prioritize. As for me, the New England compilation is time critical. The family is also one of those needing a closure report. So those are projects 1a and 1b. But while I’m working on that family, there’s a problem family in the same county whose surname begins with the same letter . . . (Did I mention that being easily distracted is one of my major research flaws? Sigh.) Next on the list is an article on the cousin swap, and then—just maybe—I’ll have time to prepare for research on that tempting Virginia problem.

Where will my research take me in 2001? I’m sure it will be hither, thither, and yon, but I’ve learned that the more focused I can be, the more likely I am to have research successes. A New Year’s analysis of where I’ve been and what I want to accomplish can help me obtain that focus.