

# **TOP 10 GENEALOGY MISTAKES**

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## **1. MISSPELLING THE WORD “GENEALOGY”**

This is fairly basic, but many people new to genealogy research have trouble spelling the word GENEALOGY. There are several ways that people spell the word, with the most common being “GENEOLOGY” with “GENEAOLGY” coming in a close second. This may not seem as if it is a big deal, but if you want to appear professional when you are posting queries or want people to take your family history research work seriously, you will need to learn to spell this and other common words correctly. Believability is critical, and nothing kills this quicker than an obvious inattention to such detail.

## **2. TRUSTING EVERYTHING YOU SEE IN PRINT**

Just because a family genealogy or a record transcription has been written down or published does not necessarily mean that it is correct. You should never make assumptions about the quality of the research of others. Anyone can make mistakes, including certified genealogists. Most printed genealogies are likely to include at least a minor error or two, and some may even be completely off base. Books which contain transcriptions (cemeteries listings, census records, wills, courthouse records, etc.) may be missing vital information, have transcription errors, or may even include invalid assumptions. Try to look at the referenced records yourself.

## **3. “WE’RE RELATED TO ...” [SOMEONE FAMOUS]**

It must be human nature to want to claim to be descended from a famous ancestor. Many people become involved in genealogy research in the first place because they share a surname with someone famous and ASSUME that it means that they are somehow related to that renowned individual. While this may eventually be proved to be true, it is very important not to jump to any conclusions and begin your research at the wrong end of your family tree! Just as you would research any other surname, you need to start with yourself and work your way back to the supposed “famous” ancestor. You will have an advantage in that many published works may already exist for the famous individual you think you may be related to, but keep in mind that any such research should be considered a secondary source. You will still need to look at the primary documents for yourself to verify the author’s research and conclusions. Just remember that the search to prove your descent from someone famous can be more fun than actually proving the connection!

## **4. JUST RECORDING NAMES AND DATES**

Genealogy is about much more than how many names you can enter or import into your database. Rather than being concerned about how far back you’ve traced your ancestors, What did they look like? Where did they live? How did they make their living? What events in history helped shape their lives, and how did they maybe shape some of this history? Your ancestors had beliefs, hopes, and dreams just as you have. While they may not have considered their lives interesting or important, I just bet you will! One of the best ways of learning more about your family’s special place in history is to interview your older living relatives. You may be surprised at the fascinating stories they have to tell when given the right opportunity and an encouraging and interested younger relative to tell them to.

## **5. BEWARE OF GENERIC FAMILY HISTORIES & FAMILY CRESTS**

They show up in magazines, your mailbox, and on the internet – advertisements which promise “A family history of [your surname] in America” Unfortunately, many people have been tempted into purchasing one of these mass-produced Surname and “Coat Of Arms” books. On arrival, most contain only a listing of names and addresses of living individuals of that surname derived from phone book or other publicly available listings – and always accompanied by an eloquently described, but usually bogus “Family Crest”.

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### **6. ACCEPTING HANDED-DOWN FAMILY LEGENDS WITHOUT QUESTION**

Most families have stories and traditions which are handed down from generation to generation. These legends can provide many clues to further your genealogy research, but you need to approach them with an open mind. Just because your Great-Grandma Mildred says that it happened that way, doesn't make it so! Stories about famous ancestors, war heroes, surname changes, and the family's national origins all probably have their roots in fact. Your job is to sort out these facts from the fiction which has grown over time as embellishments were added by subsequent tellings. Investigate for yourself, and if unable to prove or disprove a family legend, you can still include it in the narrative section of your records. Just be sure to note what is proven and not proven, and write down how you arrived at what you think is most likely correct.

### **7. LIMITING YOURSELF TO THE CURRENT SPELLING OF YOUR SURNAME**

When you have trouble locating a specific ancestor in genealogical records, the first thing you should do is search by variations in the spelling of your family's surname. The more variations you can imagine, the better. You will find that surnames are frequently misspelled in official records, for a variety of reasons. People were not as well educated in the past, and sometimes a name was written as it sounded, or just misspelled by accident. Sometimes an ancestor may have purposely changed their surname spelling to seem more elegant, or for it to be more easily remembered. Some computerized search methods, and the SOUNDEx system may help discover lost ancestors under such name variations.

### **8. NEGLECTING TO WRITE DOWN YOUR SOURCES & FILE COPIES**

Never neglect to write down where you got your information, including the name of the source, its location, and the date you obtained it. If practical, obtain your own photocopy of the source document, index it, and file it so it can be located again later. Right then you may think you will never need to see a particular record again, but all too many times that's not true. So often, even the most experienced researcher later finds that they have overlooked something or transcribed something improperly when first seeing a record. It helps to further your reputation to be able to quote from a primary source and supply a copy, if necessary, to other researchers or organizations.

### **9. ASSUMING EVERYTHING YOU FIND ON THE INTERNET IS RELIABLE**

The first rule of genealogy is to always maintain a healthy skepticism. With the explosion of genealogy information on the Internet, this has become even more necessary. Even if the information you find on a web query site or a posted database seems like the perfect match for what you are seeking, don't take such records' accuracy for granted. Such sources should be considered only as clues for you to verify independently. Contact the posting researcher directly and get to know their sources and methods better. Serious and sincere contributors will be happy to discuss their sources, admit unproven listings, welcome challenges and corrections, and offer further assistance.

### **10. PUTTING OFF TALKING TO OLDER RELATIVES**

"If only I had ...." is the lament that you often hear from genealogists who regret putting off visits with elderly relatives who have since passed away. Family members are a genealogist's #1 source, and often the ONLY source for the stories which bring our family history to life. Visiting with your relatives should be at the top of every genealogist's "to-do" list. If you just can't get in a visit right now, try writing to your relative with a list of questions. Send them a blank "Memory Book" to fill with their stories, or get a relative or friend who lives nearby to visit with them and ask them questions. You will find most such elder relatives eager to have their memories recorded for posterity, if given the proper encouragement. A portable tape recorder is useful to record the details of a conversation for later transcription.