

Bob's Bytes – The Family History Reno Project

By Bob Dawes

WHY DO A RENO?

- 1) Some of your early entries may not be complete.
- 2) New information/records have become available since you started (eg census).
- 3) Your research skills have improved.
- 4) New resources have emerged (eg DNA, online trees).
- 5) Your entry style lacked standardization (eg place names, sources).
- 6) You have unproven relationships in your tree.
- 7) You just want to clean things up.

Most genealogists consider a DO-OVER as a way to correct inaccuracies that have crept into their family history file over time. We all improve on our research and recording skills as we get more experienced, leaving a lot of our earlier research questionable. Also, new databases and resources become available which might confirm or discount an earlier decision we made about an ancestor. There are two ways to approach this reconstruction:

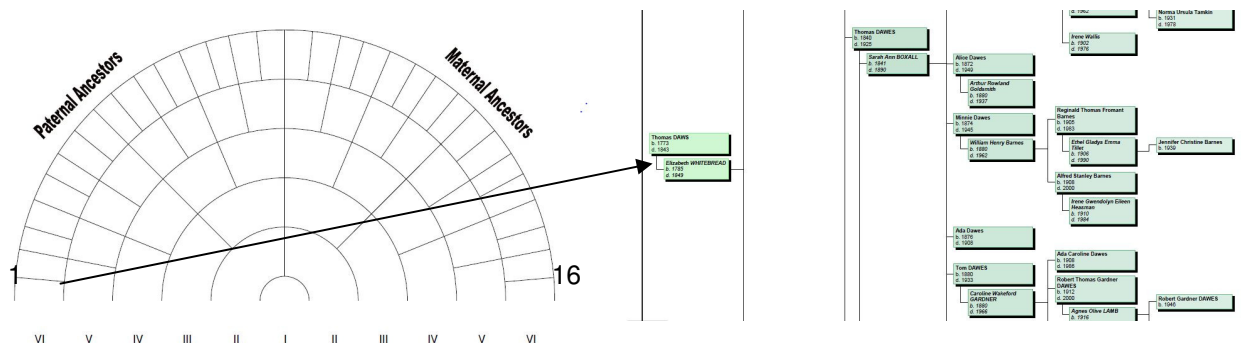
- The hard way or bottom up approach involves starting a new family file with ourselves and adding our parents and so on with the associated proof and sources.
- The easy way or top down approach where we methodically re-visit everyone in our file confirming dates and adding or editing information about new individuals and events.

This article is concerned with the easy, top down approach which also allows you to continue your current line of research while cleaning up any inaccuracies at the same time so let's get started. There is no timeline here – you can continue to work with your file adding new information while cleaning it up.

STEP 1:

Create two sets of charts

- a fan chart back from yourself to your 3rd great-grandparents.
- a set of descendant charts down from each group of 3rd G grandparents to your generation, not your children or grandchildren. This should generate sixteen groups of charts unless you have any endogamy (cousin intermarriage) in your ancestry. Don't print these all at once, start at the left of your fan with your paternal GGG-Grandparents.



The descendant chart on the right runs to 23 pages but it is my “surname” family while others aren't as complex. It is also the most in need of renovation since it's where I started 25 years ago.

STEP 2:

Make an inventory of all the records/resources that have changed since you started your family history. This will help identify what records and sources might have been missed in your original research. You might also make a note of new methods you've

developed for using specific websites or databases. Finally, you should list any inconsistencies in your file like place names, source titles, etc., that you might want to clean up as you proceed.

STEP 3: You'll also need some supplies specifically, sticky notes, a unique colour highlighter and maybe a red pen. These are to annotate your existing certificates and printouts so you'll know that you have verified the information. On your expensive or original documents use a sticky note with a colour swipe and on ordinary printouts just use a colour swipe. The red pen is for adding source information or the date it was verified and is optional.

If your genealogy program doesn't support the types of charts noted in Step 1, Progeny Genealogy has software that does [<http://progenygenealogy.com/Products/Family-Tree-Charts>]. You won't regret buying their Charting Companion which opens many program files directly or from a GEDCOM if it can't and it came free with some earlier versions of Family Tree Maker so check your installation CD.

The idea behind the fan chart is to create a list of your sixteen, 5th generation progenitor couples. In this case, you need only set their names with b & d years for information. The charts are only a guide map to your file and a way of keeping track of what you've done.

ACCURACY

When I started using a computer program, I didn't bother with sources until I ran into difficulty trying to justify where I found a person or event. Over time, I started to expand my skills to include sources for every entry, even if it was speculative or from an online tree. I also ignored the FACTS entries for occupation, baptism date, residence, etc. This is your chance to fix this oversight. My place name entries were all over the map some with street addresses or church names and others with just a country. My abbreviations also lacked consistency which created problems when outputting to genealogy reports.

RECORDS

When I started many records were unavailable:

Canada census for 1906, 1911 & 1921

UK census for 1901 & 1911

Canadian BMD registrations online through provincial websites and FamilySearch

England's 1939 Registration

Coverage of others was limited because volunteers were doing the indexing

All of this has changed and new records are being added all the time with better indexing and search capabilities. This is your chance to revisit your family and look for them in these new record sets.

RESOURCES

To look for a death in England or Wales required using the FreeBMD website to view the death registration index. Age at death was added in 1866 so the first thirty years of registration excluded this. Even with the age at death you still needed to subtract the age shown from the death year to see if the birth year made sense. With FindmyPast, you can enter the birth year and the search will only return those candidates who are the correct age. In addition, FindmyPast now includes the index up to 2016 whereas FreeBMD is only up to 1980.

However, don't totally overlook FreeBMD because it is the only place you can enter a family surname, mother's maiden name and year range from their marriage date to see all possible births to the couple. Redacted children, born after 1918, on the 1939 Registration can be confirmed using this method.

Other new resources include Scotlandspeople, GenealogyBank, Fold3 and other newspaper databases, Find-a-Grave, and DNA matches.

The General Register Office for England & Wales recently added ages at death and mother's maiden names for births to the index for the years which had been omitted previously and aren't on FreeBMD.

Carefully examine the resources and records you use today to identify what would benefit your early research entries and then revisit them using your new techniques.

Modern genealogy programs like Legacy 9, RootsMagic 7 and One World Tree by FamilySearch automatically compare your entries to available records giving you hints on where to look.

STANDARDIZATION

Early on, I didn't understand the importance of changes in boundaries and geography. New France, British North America, Canada West and Upper Canada was all Ontario. Place names are supposed to be entered using the appropriate time frame for the event date. I say supposed as this is optional and I prefer to use the latest name so it sorts properly in reports. However, I was still erratic with county and township names so some editing is required in my file. I have used both full names and abbreviations (eg. British Columbia and B.C.) so now I need to decide what I want and correct the others.

PROCESS

Take your first set of descendant charts and start with your 3rd G-Grandparents. Verify their information against any new records. Edit any information and correct any non-standard entries, add or delete children as required and verify their information. As you finish each family group, tick it off with a pencil on your printout and move to the next.

CONCLUSION

The benefit of this approach is that you don't have to start over. You are refreshing your existing file and can do as much or as little as you want at each sitting. New entries can still be added to your existing family file so nothing needs to be duplicated. As you update or verify each entry cross it off on the descendant chart and mark any certificates or printouts with the marker. People or events that can't be updated or verified I mark with an X on the descendant chart so I can re-visit them later. This is also a great way to re-energize your research while following the frame work of your original family tree. You will be surprised at the new things you'll turn up that have been overlooked. The important thing is to keep moving and not get bogged down or you will get bored and give up.