Today is an anniversary. This column is my one-hun-
dredth column for Ancestry Daily News. Many of you tell
me that you read my columns and print them out, so I
really believe that this is our anniversary.
I’d like to take the opportunity to look back at some of
the topics that I’ve covered. My impression is that the
subjects of my columns, taken as a whole, demonstrate
what genealogy and family history is about—and what it
should be about.
My first column appeared on 24 February 2000. It was
called LESSONS LEARNED FROM A JIGSAW PUZZLE and
addressed the pitfalls in handling genealogical problems
that don’t fit a classic model. I just reread it while writing
this article. I ought to reread it more often.
I guess my life is fairly genealogy-centric. I seem to
see lessons in genealogy everywhere. Two years later, I
was much wiser as I assembled another jigsaw puzzle
(LESSONS LEARNED FROM A JIGSAW PUZZLE II).
And when insomnia drove me to a book of classic
detective stories, I found that Dr. Watson had been the
recipient of an excellent piece of GENEALOGICAL ADVICE
FROM SHERLOCK HOLMES.
We’ve celebrated birthdays (AS TIME GOES BY),
Christmas (JINGLE BELLS), and New Year’s (WHERE WILL
YOUR RESEARCH TAKE YOU IN 2001? and LOOKING
BACKWARD, LOOKING FORWARD).
You’ve seen me clean my office (THE WINGS OF A
BUTTERFLY) and organize my time (LESSONS LEARNED ON
FOUR HOURS PER WEEK).
Some columns presented advice on methodology
(usually by example). My second column, I HATE
LEFTOVERS!, described my vacation—and a principle that
still guides my research. Others included RED FLAGS AND
RATIONALIZATION, ALL THE EASY ANCESTORS ARE
TAKEN, and PRECIOUS SIBLINGS.
Although I don’t often write about my own ancestral
research, you have shared a little of that. An Inspector
Morse episode on PBS’s “Mystery!” prompted me to tell
you about my paternal grandmother’s family in
INVESTIGATING FAMILY STORIES. You’ve learned about a
perturbing find in my maternal grandmother’s family in A
FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE LAND
OFFICE.
Research for my clients provided all kind of surprising
and informative things to share. In A COLONIAL RECORD
ODYSSEY we learned that I needed to have flexibility as I
followed a frustrating and surprising problem through one
American colony after another.
One of the things I discovered in writing the columns
was that there was often a lot to discuss. For example, I’d
only planned to write one column on dates, but before it
was all done, I’d found it necessary to write six of them!
TWO on RECORDING AND INTERPRETING DATES, two on
WHEN YOU DON’T HAVE A RECORD, and two on USING
DATES TO IMPROVE YOUR RESEARCH.
Surprises abounded in my research, and I got to share
some of them with you. I’ve found connections to a Rem-
brandt (WHY I NEVER GET ANYTHING DONE ON TIME), to
vampires (SEARCHING FOR SUBSTANCE), and to the New
Jersey hockey team (FOLLOWING DEVILISH LEEDS).
Most recently, there have been two series. The Word-
scape columns present explanations and context for termi-
nology we are likely to encounter in our research, as in
RELATIVITY.
The popular nursery-rhyme series has discussed ele-
ments of early-American life, from epidemics in RING
AROUND A ROSIE to the most recent WEAVING AND LINEN
(I ran out of nursery rhymes). I often found that once I
began exploring what I thought was a simple subject, it
turned out to be much more involved than I imagined. My
image of our ancestors’ lives has been considerably
altered.
Writing the columns for Ancestry Daily News forces
me to stretch and learn. They force me to examine the
accuracy of what I say. They force me to quantify my
logic processes in order to explain them to others. They
force me to be a better genealogist. I hope they help you,
too.