

The Amateur Genealogist

by Celia Lewis, MA, Genealogy consultant

People, Places, & Events: History is your friend.

TIP: Keep a file folder of dates & places handy!

Were you like me in high school? I hated all those historical events, places, and dates – I'd memorize them for an exam and promptly forget them! Oh dear – now I'm researching my greatgrandfather's military service and I don't remember when the Spanish American War began (1898). Also, states, provinces and counties changed boundaries, changed names, or became official entities at specific dates and I have no idea when! For example, if a particular province wasn't formed until 1906, I can't expect to find a birth registration for a child born there in 1894.

I've learned to gather both specific and general maps of relevant areas and dates. This way, I will have more success finding my ancestors in the correct places at the times they may have lived there. I have another sheet detailing dates and places of major events relevant to my particular family history: wars, skirmishes, ship-building centres in the UK, the Irish Famine years, and so on. These are my personal history references to help when I realize for example that a family came to the USA before Ellis Island was set up to process immigrants – therefore I won't be able to use that specific database.

These historical resources can be very helpful in uncovering your family history. Ask questions: What was happening then? Where were they living? What area was being sold or annexed? Where was the seat of government? Where were records kept? Where did ships arrive, from where? Are there passenger lists published?

For example, my grandmother Harriett G. and her 6 children including my dad, sailed to Canada from England on The Virginian in November 1914. I have a photo of this ship as well as an image of the Nov 1914 passenger list in my family binder. Details such as these make your ancestors' history come alive, and your tree much more intriguing.

Questions? Email Celia@RootsBasic.com

TIP: Google Library Archives Canada, click on Online Collections, and enjoy maps, photographs, journals and more!

