

# The Experts Answer

Various genealogy researchers share how they solved some of their favorite research puzzles.

Our regular questions and answer column, *You Wanted to Know*, will return next issue, but for this issue we decided to turn things over to the experts.

Please note that the genealogists contributing to this feature are professionals who charge for their research. While they have shared their contact information, please contact them only if you are interested in engaging their professional services.

**Q** How do I research an event for which I only know the date?

**A** About a year ago I was contacted by a woman who needed to prove — or disprove — a family legend telling of the death of a young ancestor in a railroad accident. All she knew was that the accident happened in Pennsylvania and the date of death: 17 July 1856.

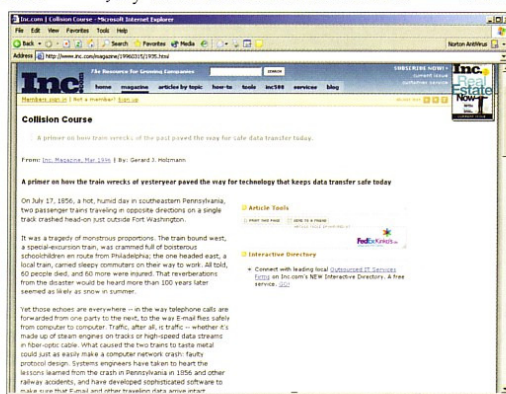
My research habit is to start with the Internet, then weed out and verify the findings by comparing them to local, “hard copy” resources. In keeping with this process, I did a Google search for “July 17, 1856.” Oddly, an account of the accident was included in an article about data technology — a lucky but effective break as I now had the basic details I needed. The accident had occurred just outside Fort Washington, Pennsylvania. It was a special excursion train from Philadelphia. The railroad was the North Penn and the accident was a head-on collision with another train.

My next step was to “Google” North Penn Railroad. This was less successful. In fact, this search turned up little more than the first article provided. It was time to “go local”.

By searching Philadelphia and Montgomery County histories I was able to stitch together several more pieces of the accident. At about 6 a.m. on the morning of 17 July an excursion train known as

toric significance. It represented the largest loss of life ever suffered in a railway accident up to that date. Because of this, news of the crash, the funerals and the subsequent investigation found

their way into a variety of newspapers in both Philadelphia and New York. And unlike modern news reports which have restrictions on the publication of names of minors, the papers of 1856 had no such reservations. Among the lists of victims of the crash was indeed the name for which my client searched — gleaned only from a date, some basic research techniques and a little luck. —*Stephanie Hoover, Pennsylvania research specialist, www.home-histories.com*



*A Google search for the date “July 17, 1856” brought up a seemingly irrelevant article about data transfer safety that, oddly enough, contained exactly the information needed for further research.*

the “picnic special” left Cohocksink Depot. It carried 600 children and youths from St. Michael’s Roman Catholic Church of Kensington. About 13 miles outside of Philadelphia the train collided with an eastbound locomotive. It was going about 30 miles per hour. Reports vary on the number of dead and wounded, but there were at least 50 killed and 60 wounded, mostly children. Father David Sheridan, St. Michael’s priest, was killed instantly. A coroner’s inquest determined that the accident was caused by the “gross negligence” of the excursion train’s conductor. I now knew the story of the accident, but had not yet confirmed that the subject of my research was one of the victims. A few hours studying “yesterday’s news” finally provided the proof needed.

The “Slaughter on the North Penn Railroad”, as newspapers dubbed it, had an unfortunate his-

**Q** A client hired me to trace the ancestors of her great-grandfather, James H. Campbell, whose marriage record transcript said he was born in “Lochalier, Canada”, son of Donald and Sarah Campbell. She had not been able to find any “Lochalier” in Canadian gazetteers.

**A** I checked my reference sources, and also was unable to locate a place called “Lochalier”.

The marriage in question took place in Ottawa, Canada’s national capital, in September 1871. The transcript of the marriage record had been provided by an online service. My first step was to get a photocopy of the original record, which, of course, had been handwritten.

The location written in the space for the groom’s birth place clearly began with “Loch”, but the rest was less clear. Not far from Ottawa are two places with names beginning with “Loch”: Lochiel, a township in Ontario and