

# HIDDEN STORIES:

## EXPLORING THE UNEXPECTED IN FAMILY HISTORY RESEARCH

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### IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

- ❖ Most genealogists are not healthcare or legal professionals; seek qualified professional help as needed.
- ❖ Follow “The Genealogist’s Code of Ethics.”<sup>1</sup>
- ❖ *Genealogy Standards*, second edition revised, provides guidance.<sup>2</sup>

### LAW IN THE TIME AND THE PLACE

*Standards 12, 14, 24*

Genealogists evaluate information within the context of time and place of the historical event. It is important to avoid *presentism*, or applying the laws and standards of today to the interpretation of the past.<sup>3</sup> To understand the information contained in a source, researchers analyze the facts against the backdrop of the source’s creation in the specific location. The law may help researchers to understand actions and potential motivations.

Historical laws for many locations and time periods can be found online\*:

- ❖ Google Books <https://books.google.com>
- ❖ Hathi Trust <https://www.hathitrust.org>
- ❖ Internet Archive <https://archive.org>

*\*Look for the law that was created or updated most recently prior to the event.*

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<sup>1</sup> Board for Certification of Genealogists, *Genealogy Standards*, second edition revised (Nashville: Ancestry.com, 2021), appendix A, “The Genealogist’s Code of Ethics,” 49-53.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. All standards noted herein refer to concepts from *Genealogy Standards* that may be useful for further study.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of presentism, see Mills, Elizabeth Shown, “Presentism,” *Evidence Explained* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, 2017), 20.

## RESOLVE CONFLICTS!

*Standards 48,49*

One component of the Genealogical Proof Standard requires the researcher to resolve conflicts before a proven conclusion can be reached. If a genealogist is still undecided after reviewing evidence, then the conclusion is likely a hypothesis or theory and not yet proven.<sup>4</sup> The key may lie in resolving the conflict!

### SOME UNANTICIPATED EVENTS

- ❖ Criminal activities
- ❖ Prison confinements
- ❖ Untimely Deaths
- ❖ Civil lawsuit involvement
- ❖ Divorce with or without complications
- ❖ Illegitimacy & Premarital Pregnancy
- ❖ Orphaned children
- ❖ Medical Issues
- ❖ Mental health issues
- ❖ Property Issues



Kilmainham Gaol by Jennifer Zinck

When looking for sources to provide information about circumstances surrounding these events, be sure to evaluate the contemporaneous establishments, institutions, and organizations that would have been likely to create some of the following records:

- ❖ Death certificates
- ❖ Medical examiner and coroner records
- ❖ Historical and modern criminal court records
- ❖ Historical and modern civil court records
- ❖ Newspapers
- ❖ Manuscript collections
- ❖ Records of temporary homes and orphanages
- ❖ Records of detention facilities

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<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of this concept, see Mills, Elizabeth Shown, "Conclusions: Hypothesis, Theory & Proof," *Evidence Explained*, 17.

International List of Causes of Death (ICD codes)

What about the handwritten numbers on some death certificates? These codes are part of an international system to monitor causes of injury and death, which has evolved and become more detailed over time. Be sure to use the code that was current at the time the death certificate was created.

HISTORICAL ICD CODES		
1900-1909	ICD-1	<a href="http://www.wolfbane.com/icd/icd1h.htm">http://www.wolfbane.com/icd/icd1h.htm</a>
1910-1920	ICD-2	<a href="http://www.wolfbane.com/icd/icd2h.htm">http://www.wolfbane.com/icd/icd2h.htm</a>
1921-1929	ICD-3	<a href="http://www.wolfbane.com/icd/icd3h.htm">http://www.wolfbane.com/icd/icd3h.htm</a>
1930-1938	ICD-4	<a href="http://www.wolfbane.com/icd/icd4h.htm">http://www.wolfbane.com/icd/icd4h.htm</a>
1930-1948	ICD-5	<a href="http://www.wolfbane.com/icd/icd5h.htm">http://www.wolfbane.com/icd/icd5h.htm</a>
1949-1957	ICD-6	<a href="http://www.wolfbane.com/icd/icd6h.htm">http://www.wolfbane.com/icd/icd6h.htm</a>
1958-1967	ICD-7	<a href="http://www.wolfbane.com/icd/icd7h.htm">http://www.wolfbane.com/icd/icd7h.htm</a>
1968-1978	ICD-8	<a href="http://www.wolfbane.com/icd/icd8h.htm">http://www.wolfbane.com/icd/icd8h.htm</a>
1979-1994	ICD-9	<a href="http://www.wolfbane.com/icd/icd9h.htm">http://www.wolfbane.com/icd/icd9h.htm</a>
1995-2022	ICD-10	<a href="http://www.wolfbane.com/icd/icd10h.htm">http://www.wolfbane.com/icd/icd10h.htm</a>

\*Additional classifications are available on the Wolfbane website. See Selected Resources.

**STATE OF TENNESSEE**  
STATE BOARD OF HEALTH  
Bureau of Vital Statistics  
CERTIFICATE OF DEATH

1 PLACE OF DEATH  
County *Dyer*  
Civil Dist. \_\_\_\_\_  
Village \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_

Registration District No. \_\_\_\_\_  
Primary Registration District No. *42502*  
St. \_\_\_\_\_ Ward \_\_\_\_\_

File No. *178*  
Registered No. *6*

2 FULL NAME *Lenora Palmer*

PERSONAL AND STATISTICAL PARTICULARS

3 SEX *Female* 4 COLOR OR RACE *White* 5 SINGLE MARRIED *Married*  
6 DATE OF BIRTH *Sept 10 1887* (Month) (Day) (Year)  
7 AGE *35* (Years) (Months) (Days) (Hours) (Minutes)  
8 OCCUPATION *Homemaker*  
9 BIRTHPLACE (State or country) *Tennessee*  
10 NAME OF FATHER *J. G. Hunt*  
11 BIRTHPLACE OF FATHER (State or country) *Tennessee*  
12 MAIDEN NAME OF MOTHER *Olivia Mayo*  
13 BIRTHPLACE OF MOTHER (State or country) *Tennessee*  
14 THE ABOVE IS TRUE TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE (Informant) *Aubrey Hunt* (Address) *Franklin, Tenn*  
15 Date *Aug 9, 1922* Registrar *S. S. Miller*

MEDICAL CERTIFICATE OF DEATH

16 DATE OF DEATH *Aug 9 1922* (Month) (Day) (Year)  
17 I HEREBY CERTIFY, That I attended deceased from *July 13 - 1922 to Aug 9 - 1922* that I first saw her (alive) on *Aug 7 9 - 1922* and that death occurred, on the date stated above, at *6:30 P.M.*  
The CAUSE OF DEATH\* was as follows: *Puerperal Peritonitis* **146**  
(Duration) *1* yrs. *1* mo. *0* ds.  
Contributory (Secondary) *Malaria* (Duration) \_\_\_\_\_ yrs. \_\_\_\_\_ mo. \_\_\_\_\_ ds.  
Signed *W. P. Watson* M. D. Address *Highland Park*  
\* - (1) THE DISEASE CAUSING DEATH; (2) 48 months from Virginia, California, and (3) MEANS OF INJURY; and (4) OTHER ACCIDENTAL, INCIDENTAL, OR HOSPITAL.

18 LENGTH OF RESIDENCE (FOR HOSPITALS, INSTITUTIONS, TRANSIENTS, OR RECENT RESIDENTS)  
At place of death \_\_\_\_\_ yrs. \_\_\_\_\_ mo. \_\_\_\_\_ ds. State \_\_\_\_\_  
Where was disease contracted, if not at place of death *Franklin, Tenn*  
Former or usual residence *Franklin, Tenn*

19 PLACE OF BURIAL OR CREMATION *Highland Park* DATE OF BURIAL *Aug 9 1922*  
20 UNDERTAKER *Carroll Hunter* ADDRESS *Franklin, Tenn*

MARGIN RESERVED FOR BINDING... WHITE PLAINLY, WITH UNFADING INK... THIS IS A PERMANENT RECORD... N. B. - Every death certificate must be filed in plain terms, so that it may be properly classified. Exact statement of OCCUPATION is very important. See instructions on back of certificate.

Form V. S. No. 4 Printing Department, Tennessee Industrial School

According to ICD-3, which was the current classification system in 1922, the cause of death for code 146 was puerperal sepsis.<sup>5</sup>

(Note that the contributory condition was malaria, which became endemic in the Tennessee River Valley during this period in history.<sup>6</sup> Details like this may enhance the research.)

<sup>5</sup> Dyer County, Tennessee, death certificates, Lenora Palmer, no. 178 (1922). Also, "International List of Causes of Death, Revision 3 (1920)," Wolfbane (<http://www.wolfbane.com/icd/icd3h.htm>).

<sup>6</sup> Health and Safety Department, Tennessee Valley Authority, "Malaria and its Control in the Tennessee Valley" ([https://openlibrary.org/works/OL17876223W/Malaria\\_and\\_its\\_control\\_in\\_the\\_Tennessee\\_Valley](https://openlibrary.org/works/OL17876223W/Malaria_and_its_control_in_the_Tennessee_Valley)).

## CALENDAR ISSUES? EVALUATE WITH TOOLS!

*Standards 36, 40, 47, 65*

### TIMELINES & TABLES

Timelines and tables can help genealogists to visualize information. Arranging information in various ways can show gaps and reveal patterns.

There are some commonly-used software platforms for constructing timelines and tables:

- ❖ AirTable <https://support.airtable.com/>
- ❖ Canva <https://www.canva.com/templates/?query=timelines>
- ❖ Microsoft Office <https://templates.office.com/en-us/Timelines>

It's usually worthwhile to make an informal chronological timeline to see how events fit together, especially when the timing is tight.

1892 Feb 10	First possible date of conception for on-time November 10 <sup>th</sup> birth
1892 Feb 11	Enlisted at location X
1892 Feb 16-20	Most likely conception days for on-time November 10 <sup>th</sup> birth
1892 Feb 20	Overstayed leave by 10 hours
1892 Apr 07	Deserted at location X
1892 Apr 19	Married mother of Child A at location X
1892 Aug 19	Rejoined and awaiting trial
1892 Aug 31	Trial by JAG District Court – sentenced to 56 days
1892 Oct 26	Imprisonment complete & returned to duties
1892 Oct 28	Deserted at location X
1892 Nov 10	Child A born at location X

### CONCEPTION CALCULATORS

These online tools appear to be designed for modern pregnancies but they're incredibly useful for genealogists! The average gestation of a human baby is forty weeks, or thirty-eight weeks from conception.<sup>7</sup> Knowing a birthdate, it is possible to calculate a window of conception for typical length pregnancies.

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<sup>7</sup> Office on Women's Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "Stages of Pregnancy" (<https://www.womenshealth.gov/pregnancy/youre-pregnant-now-what/stages-pregnancy>).

Researchers may interchange *due date* with a known birthdate and the calculator will provide a window of conception for that day, although some calculators do allow the input of birth date.

DO YOU KNOW...?	AND WANT TO KNOW...?	USE THIS TOOL
Birth date (or due date)	Possible conception dates	<a href="https://www.calculator.net/pregnancy-conception-calculator.html">https://www.calculator.net/pregnancy-conception-calculator.html</a>
Birth date (or due date)	Possible conception dates	<a href="https://www.calculators.org/health/past-age.php">https://www.calculators.org/health/past-age.php</a>
Birth date (or due date)	Possible conception dates	<a href="https://americanpregnancy.org/resources/pregnancy-calculator/">https://americanpregnancy.org/resources/pregnancy-calculator/</a>

## CALCULATORS

Calculators are quick and convenient tools to help analyze information related to age and the passage of time. Do you want to quickly calculate a birthdate based on years, months, and days on a gravestone or record? There's a calculator for that!

DO YOU KNOW...?	AND WANT TO KNOW...?	USE THIS TOOL
Date	Day of the week	<a href="https://www.timeanddate.com/date/weekday.html">https://www.timeanddate.com/date/weekday.html</a>
Date	Date in $x$ or $-x$ days	<a href="https://www.convertunits.com/dates/daysfromdate/">https://www.convertunits.com/dates/daysfromdate/</a>
Date	Date in $x$ or $-x$ days	<a href="https://www.whatisthedatetoday.com/days-from-date.html">https://www.whatisthedatetoday.com/days-from-date.html</a>
Date	Date in $x$ or $-x$ years, months, days	<a href="https://calendarhome.com/calculate/year-month-day">https://calendarhome.com/calculate/year-month-day</a>
Two dates	Years, months, days elapsed	<a href="https://www.timeanddate.com/date/duration.html">https://www.timeanddate.com/date/duration.html</a>
Two dates and times	Days, hours, minutes elapsed	<a href="https://www.calculatorsoup.com/calculators/time/time-date-difference-calculator.php">https://www.calculatorsoup.com/calculators/time/time-date-difference-calculator.php</a>
Day of the week	Other years with same days of week	<a href="https://calendarhome.com/calculate/find-like-years">https://calendarhome.com/calculate/find-like-years</a>
Date	Date in another calendar system	<a href="https://calendarhome.com/calculate/convert-a-date">https://calendarhome.com/calculate/convert-a-date</a>
Two dates	Estimated generations & other	<a href="https://www.abueling.com/en/genealogical-calculator">https://www.abueling.com/en/genealogical-calculator</a>
Age and date	Potential birth dates	<a href="https://www.abueling.com/en/genealogical-calculator">https://www.abueling.com/en/genealogical-calculator</a>
Various data	Multiple functions	<a href="https://calwiz.com/">https://calwiz.com/</a>

## SELECTED RESOURCES

### ARTICLES & PAMPHLETS

Amy Lerner Giroux, Ph.D., CG, CGL. "Date Calculations," *OnBoard* 9 (May 2003): 12-13, 10.  
<https://bcgcertification.org/skillbuilding-date-calculations/>

National Center for Health Statistics. "History of the Statistical Classification of Diseases and Causes of Death." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. 2011.  
[https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/misc/classification\\_diseases2011.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/misc/classification_diseases2011.pdf)

### BLOGS

Brianne Kirkpatrick's blog: *Watershed DNA*. 2016-2022. <https://www.watersheddna.com/blog>.  
Genetic counselor and resource for unexpected DNA results.

Debbie Mieszala's blog: *Advancing Genealogist*. 2014-2022. <http://advancinggenealogist.com/>.  
In-progress digital law library.

Judy Russell's blog: *The Legal Genealogist*, 2012-2022. <https://www.legalgenealogist.com/blog/>.  
"A genealogist with a law degree." Extensive articles relating to the law and genealogy.

### BOOKS

Board for Certification of Genealogists. *Genealogy Standards*, second edition revised. Nashville: Ancestry.com, 2021.

Mills, Elizabeth Shown. *Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace*, third edition revised. (Baltimore, Genealogical Publishing, 2017). Particularly, chapter 1.

Jones, Thomas W., *Mastering Genealogical Proof* (Arlington: National Genealogical Society, 2013.)

### WEBSITES & WIKI

"Birth and Death Date Calculators." *FamilySearch Wiki*. [https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Birth\\_and\\_Death\\_Date\\_Calculators](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Birth_and_Death_Date_Calculators).

"Calendars and Dates > Birthdate Calendars and Calculators." *Cyndi's List*.  
<https://www.cyndislist.com/calendars/birthdate-calendars-and-calculators/>.

"International Classification of Diseases." *Wolfbane*. [www.wolfbane.com/icd/index.html](http://www.wolfbane.com/icd/index.html).

\*All resources in this document were last checked 1 October 2022.