

## **We Are All Related**

**by Marjorie Weiler-Powell**

"Live and learn." I found this little bit of commentary in a diary over 155 years old. This expression is still in common use today. Discovering things I have in common with my ancestors generates a great feeling of connection.

As a genealogist, I am constantly learning new tips and tricks for research. Deciphering the written words of an author long dead is a challenge. The most useful tip to reading another's handwriting is to compare letters/squiggles found in other known words. I am glad that I do not have to spend hours handwriting my own research findings. I learned touch typing in school in preparation for my secretarial career, which was one of the five careers suggested to women back in my day (the others being wife, mother, nursing, and teaching. But that's another topic).

I can sympathize with the county clerks, because I can remember in grade school having to copy, copy and copy from these huge blackboards that were 4 feet high and 10 feet long. The school did not own a Xerox machine, mimeograph machine, or a thermograph machine (some of you youngsters may even be wondering, "what are those last two?"). The teachers would write out our exam study questions on history, health, science, etc. which the students then had to copy down. We had to write quickly, because as soon as both walls of blackboards were full, the teacher would go back and erase the first to continue. To this day I have a permanent indent on one of my fingers from that.

So consider that those dutiful county clerks spent their entire day writing and writing, which produced those inevitable blobs that are so frustrating to us researchers now as we try to decipher around (or through) those black marks on paper or microfilm. Cheap, smooth-flowing ink pens have only been around for 35 years. Does anyone else remember ru-

ining a shirt pocket or a purse or a book because of a leaky pen? And what about that research paper that had to be so painstakingly written because neatness was part of your grade? There always seemed to be an interruption which necessitated recapping the pen and stopping your writing. Upon eagerly returning to finish the homework assignment, you quickly uncapped your pen and put it to paper. "Aaagh!" There was now a big blob of ink on the paper because the pen tip had gotten ink pooled in its lid (I won't mention the fairly common brand name of the pen). Thank goodness, that problem has been fixed with most modern pens (there's always an exception, though).

So I enjoy deciphering script and as a genealogist, I get plenty of practice since I prefer to access original records. Recently, while I was merrily cruising through some records, I came across a connection to my family line with a strange last name.

Because I had committed most of my ancestral surnames to memory and was familiar with a lot of names in the geographical area, I was puzzled by this entry. It looked like WVK, or UNK. I decided on the latter because, of course, by deduction there has to be a vowel in the name. Still, it was so

strange. I come from a mostly German line, but the Alsace Lorraine part had some French so this could have been a case of some weird French line.

I was in a hurry and I figured, "Record now and ponder later." I continued my research but then this name popped out at me again. I was thinking: "Who in the heck are these people?!" "I've got to ask my mom and dad if they ever heard their parents or relatives talk about these guys." "Where did they come from?" "Could this UNK be related to the previous UNK?"

I decided to copy the information, because it is

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easier to copy and then throw out a miscellaneous record than it is to try and find it again later when you realize you need it. Besides, one needs to keep an open mind about the spelling of ancestral names.

But, it kept bugging me. I stared at it and kept thinking, "This has got to be a clerk recording error; or perhaps someone he knew well and abbreviated the name?" "Maybe this is some phonetic spelling." So I reviewed in my mind what I knew about pronunciations in various foreign languages. I'm familiar with Latin, Spanish, German, some French, Russian and Italian and could squeeze out a little Polish and Gaelic, if I had to. But, UNK? "Got to be those crazy countries around Eastern Europe". "Right?" Hmm. They're crazy because they don't spell things the way I'm accustomed.

So, I recorded this entry too, even though I don't know how we could be related. Then I went back to cruising down my information highway and I came across this family of NNGs. "Oh boy, another odd name. I wonder if they know the UNKs? Ha. Ha." I continued researching, but those odd names preyed upon my mind. They were distract-

ing. I wanted to get that section of my research done, and I knew I had to press on because this library was closing in half an hour. You know the feeling – it's a Murphy's Law that the best information is always found 5 minutes before closing.

I read on and recorded more information and then the handwriting shifted and it was a new recorder. This one was inclined to use whole words on the forms instead of abbreviations. What a blessing! I'm certain all researchers have run across those clerks who abbreviate everything from d for day, to bp for baptism, etc. And just look, this person wrote something even when he didn't know the surname of the person he was recording information for...

And BINGO, something snapped in my brain and I just started laughing out loud, ignoring the weird looks from the other people in the room. You've figured it out, haven't you? I've always heard that everyone is related to everyone else and this proves it.

We all know people named UNK and NNG because those are the abbreviations for "UNKNOWN" or "NO NAME GIVEN!"

Live and learn.

## **WANTED: Newsletter Staff**

The Indiana Genealogical Society is seeking a volunteer to be an Editorial Assistant for the *IGS Newsletter*, which is published 6 times a year. The Editorial Assistant is in charge of proofreading each issue of the newsletter for spelling errors, formatting issues, etc. It is not a paid position, but expenses are reimbursed. The time commitment is 5-10 hours per issue. The ability to meet deadlines is a must--the Editorial Assistant must be able to quickly proofread each issue and send back any corrections to the Editor within 4-5 days of receiving it.

IGS is still looking for someone to take over as Editor for the *IGS Newsletter*. The Editor is responsible for putting together each issue, using the regular columns and items that are submitted, as well as compiling information from other relevant sources. This is not a paid position, but expenses (such as software, ink cartridges and postage) are reimbursed. The ability to meet deadlines is a must; some familiarity with using Microsoft Publisher and generating PDF files with Adobe Acrobat is recommended. The time commitment is 10-15 hours per issue.

If you are interested in either of these positions, or would like more information, please contact: Meredith Thompson, 1455 Cherry Tree Rd., Avon IN 46123; E-mail [newsletter@indgensoc.org](mailto:newsletter@indgensoc.org)