

Archaeologists Dig for Answers. Shouldn't Genealogists Do the Same?



old farm

How often have you passed old corn fields and apple orchards on the road? An old torn-down barn, red bricks scattered in the yard, the remains of a few budding jonquils and daylilies? Did you have the impression of an unpleasant existence? If you found where the out-house stood, you might notice that old bottles and trash were dumped in that hole. And the well might house a few relics of the past lives of our ancestors.

Ironically, archaeologists do not see open space as a depressing wilderness. In fact, they are prepared to dig deep into the soil to find more evidence of past generations. The key is to locate the old home site of the ancestors,

then examine everything, including the markings of tractor tires. Every grave in this country has not been located. In fact, there are many graves around old farms which can be discovered by noticing humps in the soil and broken slate tombstones buried under weeds.

Nearby woods, full of briars and scrub trees and bushes, were once cleared and planted. When you walk across a deserted field, do you ever think that graves may lie under your feet? Or that the rutted terrain could be an old road? How about the dried up pond? Is that a good place to search for relics?

Just as treasures are hid under the ground, information is hidden in old documents found at court houses. Plats, deeds, wills, estates, tax digests, etc. Most genealogists do not see their ancestors at first glance. That is because they were searching for one name only. However, a visit to the family cemetery will reveal relatives and friends, and husbands of the daughters. It is advisable to become familiar with these names and recognized them in other documents.

I have searched for one particular family for more than 40 years. However, not until I sat down and read every last will and testament written in that county (for a specified era) as well as the estate sales, old deeds and tax digests, did I realize that it was all there in the subtle inference of family members. A familiarity with the people in the neighborhood is invaluable in realizing that some of them were kin and piecing together the puzzle.