

HANDWRITING 101

By Angie Grigg

Books on handwriting are filed in libraries under the heading of Paleography. The subject of handwriting is also included in many locality research books. These would be specific for the language of the area.

Other than cyrillic, arabic, etc., handwriting patterns seem to cross national borders. Elements of German gothic script are found in early Swedish, American and English records. I have found it helps to study a little of all styles of writing because it broadens the base I use to read any language.

Handwriting styles changed with the centuries. Sometimes it will take a great deal of study to decipher a record. Make a print of the film and take it home to study. Sometimes I use a two or three part system of deciphering. The first line is as it seems to be in the record, the second line is how it should have been or would be with our modern spelling, and the third line is a translation if it is in another language. It is surprising how much you can read if you use this method. Slowly filling in the blanks as you can read more of it and the style of writing begins to make sense.

Another great help is to compile an alphabet of the writing in the area you are researching. Find the words and names you **CAN** read and use those letters to decipher the ones you can't read.

It helps me to study the mechanics of the style of writing. Where did the pen go down, what direction did it go and where was it lifted? Did the scribe consistently break words as he ran out of ink, did he regularly run words together until he needed ink?

Remember, they made their own pens from goose or crow quills, and made their own ink from soot and other chemicals or juices. Some inks stayed better, some faded and some blurred.

Until Noah Webster published his first dictionary, no one cared about spelling. Anything phonetic was correct. That is why one man spelled his own name three different ways in one document. Don't skip over your family names because they are not spelled the way the name is spelled today. We have over 30 ways the 'Oyler' name was spelled in Pennsylvania and Virginia. The people were not always 'book learned' and they gave their name to the clerk who wrote it as it sounded to him. Sample: Oller, Oiler, Ailer, Eilor, Uhler, Iller, Iler, etc. It has been published by misreading as Ollenu.

When we remember that they had to write everything by hand, we understand the wide usage of abbreviations. Many abbreviations were standardized. Hand writing books and web sites will often have lists of common abbreviations. Often they wrote the first letter then raised the last letter - W^m - or letters - Elizth. Remember that they abbreviated occupations and terms as well as names. Ditto is often found d^o.

There is also the problem of Latin carry-overs. Most scribes in

the early period were educated in Latin. Latin script used the same 'J' for both J and I, the same 'V' for U and V. So when you see Jssac, Jsrael, etc, use the I for Issac and Israel. The same with Vrsula/Ursula, Vlrich/Ulrich, vpon/upon, seueral/several.

SPELLING VARIATIONS

We are not hunting for PEOPLE, we are hunting for WRITTEN WORDS.

Variations arise from how people spelled their names, and how census enumerators and indexers wrote those names.

Variations arise from how people pronounce and others hear the names.

Variations arise from how people read and interpret the names.

Be aware of the five classes of variations, ways indexers have hidden your family names.

1. Calligraphic look-alikes: Daniel/David, Marta/Maria, Nathan/Mathew, Ball/Bell/Boll/Bull, Sanderdale, Lauderdale, Jehu/John.
2. Phonetic equivalents: Lydecker/Litaker, Myatt/Maillote, de la Hunte/Dillahunty, Hansel/Ansel, Horton/Orton, St. Syr/Sincere, Iler/Eyler/Ahler/Oiler, Ratton/Wroughton, Vanlandingham/Flannagen, Utah/Eutah, Missouri/Massooraa.
3. Translation equivalents: Calbfleisch/Veal, Rubsamens/Turnip seed, Swartz/Black, Heinrich/Henry, Jacob/James.
4. Truncates: Fitzgerald/Gerald/Jurrell, O'Sullivan/Sully, Haythornthwaite/Haythorn, Strohmaier/Maier, Browning/Brown, de Villeponteaux/Pontoux, Iturriondobritia/ Iturri.
5. Spelling irregularities: Cowper pronounced as Cooper, Coke pronounced as Cook, Featherstonehaugh pronounced (so it is said) Fanshaw.

PHONETICS AND THE U.S. SOUND EX SYSTEM

I include this because these are letters interchanged by usage or misunderstanding. We don't always hear them clearly.

1. B, F, P, V -- Ventura/Bentura, Fabiana/Papiana, Veronica/Peronica, Beronica, Basques/Vasques, Pablo/Baplo
2. C, G, K, J, S, Q, X, Z (C, G, S, & the Scrabble high five, J, K, Q, X, Z) Catharina/Gadalina, Campos/Canpos, Kathy/Cathy
3. D, T -- Tomas/Domas Mendoza/Mentosa
4. L--Not interchanged in the Soundex Code, but does interchange with R in language usage.
5. M, N
Mama/Nana Grampa/Grandpa
6. R--See #4, letter L above.

Don't lock in on one name or one letter. Keep you mind open to suggestions. There is not only one correct way to write a letter or a number. You may think it is a 'J' but it could be an 'I'. Maybe it looks like Meary, but with a fancy 'M' the name would be Mary. Leon is just Leon with a curlicue on the 'L'.

Use all resources to help you decide. There are many web sites for handwriting. Do a Google search using handwriting + the locality and maybe even the time period.

When you find a letter written in a 'different' way, collect it, make a tracing or duplicate it as closely as you can. Keep this collection to help you in other documents.

Try to make sense of the records. Use other information to determine what is difficult to read. If the husband was born in 1858 it is unlikely that the wife was born in 1839, unlikely, not impossible. 3's and 5's can look very much alike.

Ninety percent or more of the names will be names common to the area. They usually did not invent names as our young parents are doing today. You will be able to recognize the name or find it in other sources. Puritans named their children for the characteristics they wished them to emulate, Resolve, Patience, Hope, Charity, Reserved, Freelove, etc.

Some times it helps to count the humps in names such as Anna or Amy, Minnie or Mamie, etc.

My Great Grandfather's name was Jehu Blackburn and his father was also Jehu Blackburn. One of his sons was Thomas Jehu Blackburn, called Jaley. I have seen their names misread as John, Jehn, Jay Hue, and Jay Lee. I understand how a poorly written Jehu can be seen as John, but it sure is hard to get it corrected when so many people have carried on the mistake.

If the record was recorded in Latin, the names will be translated into Latin. John/Johannes or Johannis. The form of the name fits with the family position of the person. Johannes for a son, Johannis for the father.

The leading 'S' is one of the biggest problems and the most wide spread, that I have seen. It is not only used in early record, where it was standard, but also is found in much more recent records. It is cropping up in the records being indexed in FamilySearchIndexing. It can look like a 'p' or an 'f'. I have seen Moss read and indexed as Mops, Jesse as Jepe, Ross as Rofs.

Another common usage is 'X' for Christ. We are all familiar with Xmas. Have you seen Xtian, Xopher, Xina?

When they used Roman numerals, they usually wrote them with small letters, not capitals as we do. xiiij, vii, xv, xxxiiij Usually the last 'i' was written as a 'j'.

The last four months of the year were abbreviated with numbers, 7^{ber}, 8^{ber}, 9^{ber}, X^{ber} or 10^{ber}. Their position in the Julian calendar. September was the seventh month, etc.

A	Ɽ	ꝛ	Ɽ	Ɽ	a	ꝛ	ꝛ	ꝛ	ꝛ
B	Ꝟ	Ꝟ	Ꝟ	Ꝟ	b	Ꝟ	Ꝟ	Ꝟ	Ꝟ
C	Ꝣ	Ꝣ	Ꝣ	Ꝣ	c	Ꝣ	Ꝣ	Ꝣ	Ꝣ
Ch	Ꝥ	-	Ꝥ	Ꝥ	ch	Ꝥ	Ꝥ	Ꝥ	Ꝥ
D	Ꝩ	Ꝩ	Ꝩ	Ꝩ	d	Ꝩ	Ꝩ	Ꝩ	Ꝩ
E	Ꝭ	Ꝭ	Ꝭ	Ꝭ	e	Ꝭ	Ꝭ	Ꝭ	Ꝭ
F	Ꝯ	Ꝯ	Ꝯ	Ꝯ	f	Ꝯ	Ꝯ	Ꝯ	Ꝯ
G	ꝰ	ꝰ	ꝰ	ꝰ	g	ꝰ	ꝰ	ꝰ	ꝰ
H	ꝲ	ꝲ	ꝲ	ꝲ	h	ꝲ	ꝲ	ꝲ	ꝲ
I	ꝴ	-	ꝴ	ꝴ	i	ꝴ	ꝴ	ꝴ	ꝴ
J	ꝶ	ꝶ	ꝶ	ꝶ	j	ꝶ	ꝶ	ꝶ	ꝶ
K	-	-	ꝸ	ꝸ	k	-	-	ꝸ	ꝸ
L	ꝺ	ꝺ	ꝺ	ꝺ	l	ꝺ	ꝺ	ꝺ	ꝺ
LI	-	-	ꝼ	ꝼ	ll	ꝼ	ꝼ	ꝼ	ꝼ
M	Ꝿ	Ꝿ	Ꝿ	Ꝿ	m	Ꝿ	Ꝿ	Ꝿ	Ꝿ

N	<i>nm</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>N</i>	n	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>
Ñ	-	-	-	<i>Ñ</i>	ñ	<i>ñ</i>	<i>ñ</i>	<i>ñ</i>	<i>ñ</i>
O	<i>w</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>O</i>	O	<i>o</i>	<i>o</i>	<i>o</i>	<i>o</i>
P	<i>P</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>P</i>	P	<i>p</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>p</i>
Qu	<i>Qu</i>	-	<i>Qu</i>	<i>Qu</i>	qu	<i>qu</i>	<i>qu</i>	<i>qu</i>	<i>qu</i>
R	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i>	r	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>
RR	-	-	-	<i>RR</i>	rr	<i>rr</i>	<i>rr</i>	<i>rr</i>	<i>rr</i>
S	<i>S</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>S</i>	S	<i>s</i>	<i>s</i>	<i>s</i>	<i>s</i>
T	<i>T</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>T</i>	t	<i>t</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>t</i>
U	<i>U</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>U</i>	u	<i>u</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>u</i>
V	<i>V</i>	<i>V</i>	<i>V</i>	<i>V</i>	V	<i>v</i>	<i>v</i>	<i>v</i>	<i>v</i>
W	-	-	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	W	<i>w</i>	-	<i>w</i>	<i>w</i>
X	<i>X</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>X</i>	X	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>
Y	<i>Y</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>Y</i>	Y	<i>y</i>	<i>y</i>	<i>y</i>	<i>y</i>
Z	<i>Z</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>Z</i>	Z	<i>z</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>z</i>