

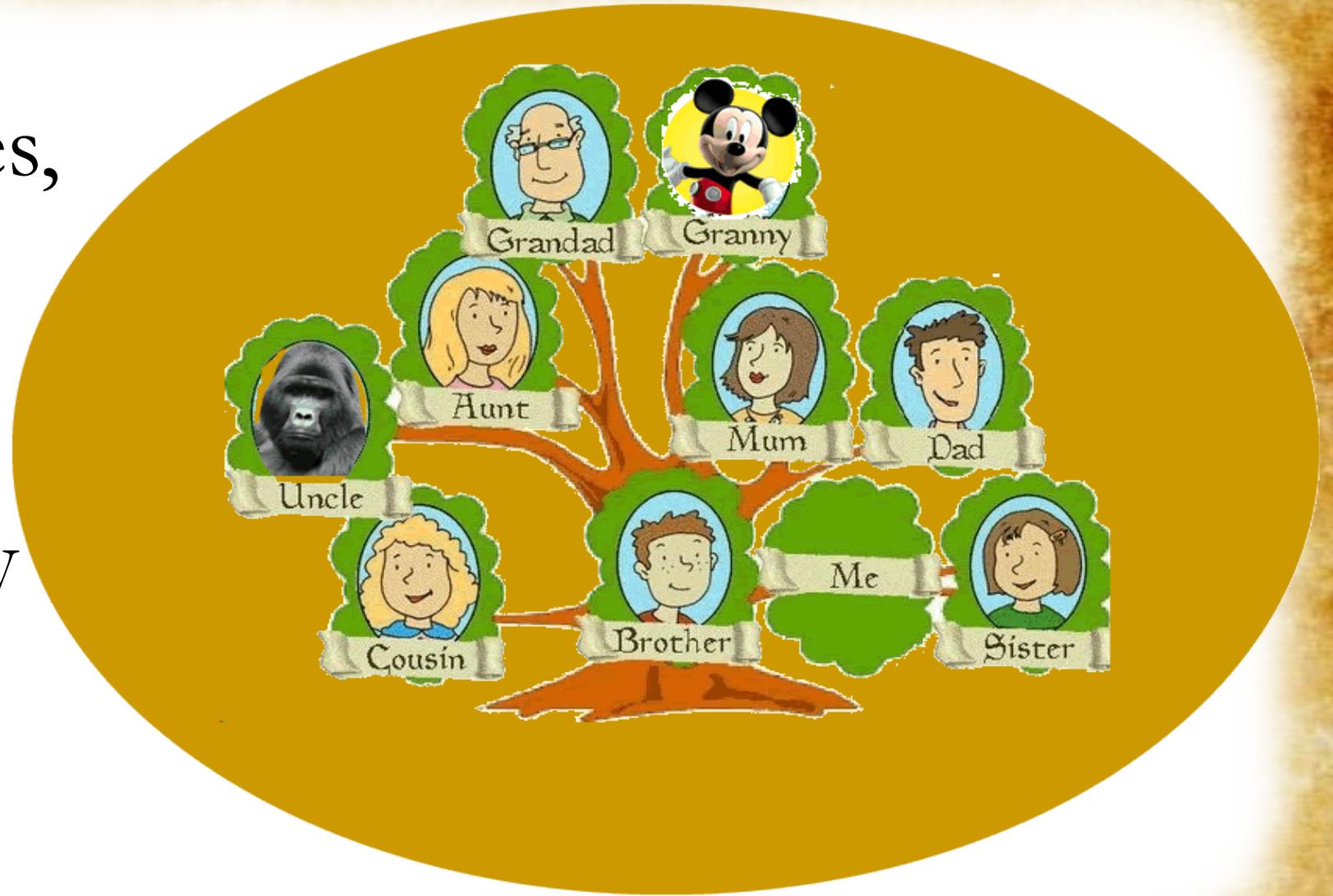
How to Find and Fix Errors in Your Family Tree

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Our Family Trees

- Our Family Trees are the roadmaps to our Family History.
- They don't tell much of a story, but they tell us where to find it.
- The only thing worse than not having a roadmap is to have one with errors in it.

But, sometimes,
no matter how
hard we try,
errors sneak
into our family
tree.



Consistency Checking

- You can detect many errors simply by looking for consistency.
- Note that Consistency does not equal Correctness, but inconsistency is almost certainly an indication that something is wrong.
- There are some automated consistency checkers (more on that later,) but you can detect, or better yet avoid, errors by making sure your entries are consistent.

“There’s No Errors in My Tree!”

- Don’t bet too much money on that.
- I thought my tree was pretty clean.
- Years ago I designed a new website for my family and pulled a GEDCOM to move my tree.
- I have some automated tools to look for certain errors built into the admin interface for my personal site.
- These tools found many more errors than I expected, so I started looking further and will add more tools to the site.

Source of Errors

- Typos (easy to do, easy to miss)
- Other People's Trees (OPT)
 - Useful as hints, but notoriously full of bad data
 - Myheritage, Ancestry, Geni, Wikitree, and others
 - People copy from each other and bad data spreads like the plague
- Old Books
- Newspapers (obits probably OK, but beware of human interest articles)
- Genealogy Society papers without proper sources

Common Origins of Errors

- Mistaken Identity: Right Name – Wrong Person
- Multiple Spouses: Children attached to wrong spouse
- Merged Families: Fathers with same name assumed to be same person
- Multiple Generations with same names
- Folklore reported as fact

Consistency Checks - Individuals

Birth After Death

Causes

- Maybe just a typo
- Sometimes birth or death record from a different generation or wrong person

Fixes

- Look at dates of spouses/parents to see if birth or death date is unreasonable
- For birth find birth certificate, baptismal record, or birth announcement that names the parents and location.
- For death find a death certificate, burial record, or obit that name relatives and location.

Consistency Checks - Individuals

Event before birth or
after death

(examples: newspaper
reports, census data,
home or land records)

Causes

- Mistaken Identity
- Document error
- Birth or death date wrong

Fixes

First step: determine what looks suspicious so you know where to focus

- If birth or death look suspicious, search for real records (previous slide)
- If an event looks suspicious, try to determine the authentication of the record.

Consistency
Checks -
Individuals

Lived Too Long
Age at death
exceeds normal
life expectancy

Causes

People can live to 100 or more, but it is rare. I have eleven ancestors who made it to over 100.

Longevity is hereditary. If someone lived abnormally long for their family line, view it as suspicious

Fixes

Verify birth and death with reliable sources, as previously discussed.

Check to be sure the birth and death records you have are for the same generation.

Consistency Checks - Individuals

Marked as alive,
but too old
(probably not
alive)

Causes

This is a problem because shared trees block all data on living people

Death date is, or was, unknown and the person creating the record failed to mark the individual as deceased.

Fixes

Find a reliable death record.

If none can be found, mark the person as deceased and state date as unknown.

Consistency
Checks -
Individuals

Multiple birth,
baptismal, or
death dates
reported.

Causes

People find multiple records with the same name, don't know which is correct, and record them all in their tree.
Merged data from multiple trees.

Fixes

Use data you have and try to verify which is correct.
For birth or baptism find a record that names the parents.
For death, find a record that names the spouse and/or children.

Consistency Checks - Individuals

Baptism before Birth

Causes

Often there are no actual birth records. Birth data is “guesstimated” from census records or other data.

Sometimes the baptismal data is for a different person with the same name.

Fixes

Determine which is suspicious (which do you have a real source for?) If the baptismal date is verifiable, but the birth date is not, put “before”, “about”, or “circa” with the birth date.

Consistency Checks - Individuals

Burial before
death
(I hope this
doesn't happen
to me!)

Causes

Mistaken identity

Estimated death date

Fixes

Like births and baptisms, often the burial data is more accurate and verifiable than the death date.

If the burial date is verifiable, say “before”, or “circa” by death date.

The burial record may give you the death date.

Consistency Checks - Spouses

Married Too Young
Be careful – In colonial times people, especially women, often married young (but there is a limit.)

Causes

Possible wrong spouse
Guesstimated dates
Mistaken identity

Fixes

Check birth dates and wedding dates against reliable sources. Usually, the parents are listed on the wedding record. This may help prove the identities.

Look for multiple spouses. Sometimes the wedding date for the first spouse is associated with the second.

Consistency
Checks -
Spouses

Marriage before
birth or after
death of one
spouse

Causes

Date typo

Generational Confusion

Mistaken Identity (perhaps wrong spouse)

Fixes

Look for obvious typo

Verify birth and death dates

Check marriage record to see if parents match those named in the birth records.

Consistency
Checks -
Spouses

Difference of
ages too great

Causes

Date typo

Generation Confusion

May/December wedding

Fixes

Look for obvious date error

Check marriage records to make sure you don't have a generation error

Consistency
Checks -
Spouses

Multiple
marriages or
wedding dates
for the same
couple

Causes

Merged trees

Mistaken identities

Fixes

Find a real marriage record, preferably one that names the parents of both the bride and the groom. Church records, newspaper announcements, or town records are all candidates for establishing the correct date.

Consistency
Checks –
Parent and
Child

Child older
than one or
both parents

Causes

Typo
Mistaken Identity
Merged Trees

Fixes

Look first for obvious typo.

Look to see if one of these parents is the right age. If both are wrong the problem is either the child's birthdate or perhaps the child is from a different generation.

If only one parent is younger, either their birthdate is wrong, or they are not the correct spouse. (possible different generation)

Consistency Checks – Parent and Child

Child born after
the death of a
parent.

Causes

Most likely cause is death of wife and husband remarried.
This child is from the subsequent wife.

Possible this child is not from this family.

Fixes

Search for a marriage record with the husband's name
sometime after the death of the wife and before the birth of
the child.

Search for birth record for the child that identifies who the
parents were.

Consistency
Checks –
Parent and
Child

Child born
when parent
was too young
or too old.

Causes

Child from a different spouse

Child from a different generation or family branch

Merged Trees

Fixes

Search for birth record that identifies both parents.

Location may also be a clue to invalidate coincidences where parents had common names.

Consistency
Checks –
Parent and
Child

Too Many
Children

Causes

Merged Trees

Name confusion resulting in duplicates (Peter and Pierre)

Confusion on generations

Fixes

Be careful. In times past families were often large, especially of there were multiple wives.

Verify birth records of the children

Consistency
Checks –
Siblings

Siblings too
close in age

Causes

Merged trees
Calendar Change

Fixes

If date is prior to 1752, check for calendar change issue (next slide)

Verify birth records. Make sure both children are from the same parents.

Calendars -The Sun and the Moon

- Our modern calendar is based on the earth's orbit around the sun. The months have no relationship to the moon.
- The Islamic and Chinese calendars are based on the motion of the moon around the earth.
- The Jewish Calendar links years to the cycle of the earth around the sun and months to the cycle of the moon.
- Calendars have changed over time. Dates in historical records may not refer to the modern calendar
- In 1752 the English Parliament made a major change that often confuses genealogists.

The Julian Calendar

- In 45 B.C., Julius Caesar ordered a calendar consisting of twelve months based on a solar year. This calendar employed a cycle of three years of 365 days, followed by a year of 366 days (leap year).
- When first implemented, the "Julian Calendar" also moved the beginning of the year from March 1 to January 1.
- However, following the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth century, the new year was gradually realigned to coincide with Christian festivals until by the seventh century, Christmas Day marked the beginning of the new year in many countries.

The Julian Calendar Evolves

- By the ninth century, parts of southern Europe began observing first day of the new year on March 25 to coincide with Annunciation Day. The last day of the year was March 24. However, England did not adopt this change in the beginning of the new year until late in the twelfth century.
- Because the year began in March, records referring to the "first month" pertain to March; to the second month pertain to April, etc., so that "the 19th of the 12th month" would be February 19.
- In Latin, September means seventh month, October means eighth month, November means ninth month, and December means tenth month. Use of numbers, rather than names, of months was especially prevalent in Quaker records.

The Gregorian Calendar

- The Julian Calendar had a leap year, but it wasn't quite right.
- By 1582, seasonal equinoxes were falling 10 days "too early," and some church holidays, such as Easter, did not always fall in the proper seasons.
- Pope Gregory XIII authorized, and most Roman Catholic countries adopted, the "Gregorian" or "New Style" Calendar."
- As part of the change, ten days were dropped from the month of October (for the year of the change only)
- January 1 was established as the first day of the new year.
- Protestant countries, including England and its colonies, not recognizing the authority of the Pope, continued to use the Julian Calendar.

Parallel Calendars

- Between 1582 and 1752, not only were two calendars in use in Europe (and in European colonies), but two different starts of the year were in use in England.
- March 25 was the official start of the new year, but many people celebrated January 1 as New Year's Day.
- To avoid misinterpretation, both the "Old Style" and "New Style" year was often used in English and colonial records for dates falling between New Years (January 1) and old New Year (March 25), a system known as "double dating." Example March 13, 1649/50.

Changes of 1752

- In accordance with a 1750 act of Parliament, England and its colonies changed calendars in 1752.
 - The Gregorian method of calculating leap year was adopted.
 - Eleven days were dropped from September for the year 1752
 - January 1 became the official start of the year.
- We still use this calendar today

The consequences for Genealogy

- Suppose you have an ancestor from colonial times, and they had two children.
- One born February 1, 1643, and one born April 4, 1643.
- One might think this is an error, they are only a few months apart.
- On the old calendar they are really ten months apart.
 - The one born April 4th is the oldest
 - The one born February 1st on the old calendar was born in 1644 on the new and is eleven months younger
- Solution: Dates between 1582 and 1752 and between January 1st and March 25th for English countries are properly recorded using the double dating system, for example, 1643/4, or as an alternative, use the modern date.

Consistency
Checks –
Siblings

Siblings with
the same first
name

Causes

Double accounting (Peter and Pierre)
Merged trees
Possibly legitimate

Fixes

In past times when infant mortality rates were high, couples would often name a subsequent child using the same name as one that had died. Look for a death record of the older sibling.

Consistency
Checks –
Siblings

Different last
names

Causes

Mistaken Identity

Could be legitimate – Husbands died sometimes too, and wives remarried and had more children.

Fixes

Check birth records closely for the names of both parents.

Also, this is an interesting case of the children adopting a different last name. Three generations of my wife's Labadie ancestors used the last name of Badichon. Chief Pontiac gave that name to their recent ancestor, Antoine Des Comps Labadie. The Badichon children were descended from Antoine and Chief Pontiac's daughter. Subsequent generations reverted back to the Labadie surname.

Data Entry Errors

- Prefix in the first name field
- Suffix in the last name field
- Year recorded as two digits
- Dates in the future
- Incorrect or inconsistent use of upper/lower case
- Data in the wrong field
- Same sex spouses
- Inconsistent spelling of names/places

Supporting Document Errors

- Tagged in a photo before birth or after death
- Documents for the wrong person
- Documents for the wrong event
- Reference to old books that have unproven or bad data
- Broken links to web sites

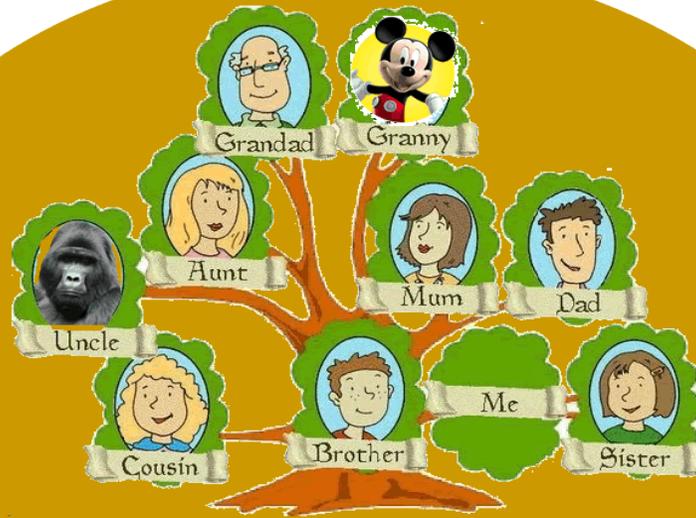
Preventing Errors

- The easiest way to fix errors is to avoid them in the first place
- Use the checklist at the end of this presentation when entering new information into your tree.
- Avoid making assumptions about relationships without supporting sources
- Beware of OPT
- Check all data with automated consistency checkers if possible

Automated Tools

- MyHeritage Consistency Checker
- Family Tree Maker
- Ancestry has recently added a consistency checker as an added cost product.
- Others?

Takeaways



- Family trees are the roadmaps to your family history
- Errors in your map can lead you astray
- It is easy for errors to creep into anyone's tree.
- Most online OPTs contain errors
- The easiest way to prevent errors is to check all of your data when you enter it.
- Consistency doesn't mean you are right, but inconsistency means you are wrong.

Genealogy Error Check List

Individual

- Birth after death
- Event before birth or after death
- Lived too long
- Alive but too old
- Multiple birth dates, death dates or baptismal dates recorded
- Baptism before birth
- Burial before death
- Spouses
- Married too young
- Marriage before birth or after death of one spouse
- Difference of ages too great
- Multiple marriages or wedding dates by the same couple

Genealogy Error Check List

Parent and Child

- Child older than a parent
- Child born after the death of a parent
- Child born when a parent was too young or too old
- Too many children

Siblings

- Siblings too close in age
- Siblings with the same first name
- Siblings with different last names

Genealogy Error Check List

Data Entry Errors

- Prefix in first or last name
- Suffix in first or last name
- Year recorded as two digits
- Dates in the future
- Incorrect or inconsistent use of upper/lower case
- Data in the wrong field
- Same-sex spouses (currently possible, but not accepted in past times.)
- Inconsistent last name spelling
- Inconsistent place spelling
- Support Document Errors
- Tagged in photo before birth or after death
- Documents for the wrong person
- Reference to old books that have unproven and perhaps incorrect information



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