

## "DOLLARHIDE'S GENEALOGY RULES," by William Dollarhide

Bill Dollarhide has prepared the following 45 amusing pointers for genealogy researchers. While each aphorism is intended to produce a chuckle or two, each contains an important element of genealogical truth as well. Consider #17: "Finding the place where a person lived may lead to finding that person's arrest record." The point of #17 is that researchers must keep an open mind. No one knows what is around the next bend in one's ancestral road.

1. Treat the brothers and sisters of your ancestor as equals, even if some of them were in jail.
2. Death certificates are rarely filled in by the person who died.
3. When visiting a funeral home, wear old clothes, no make-up, and look like you have about a week to live. The funeral director will give you anything you ask for if he thinks you may be a customer soon.
4. The cemetery where your ancestor was buried does not have perpetual care, has no office, is accessible only by a muddy road, has snakes, tall grass, and lots of bugs--and many of the old gravestones are in broken pieces, stacked in a corner under a pile of dirt.
5. A Social Security form SS-5 is better than a birth certificate because few people had anything to do with the information on their own birth certificate.
6. The application for a death certificate you want insists that you provide the maiden name of the deceased's mother, which is exactly what you don't know and is the reason you are trying to get the death certificate in the first place.
7. If you call Social Security and ask where to write for a birth certificate, tell them it is for yourself. They won't help you if you say you want one for your great-great-great-great-great-great grandfather who died in 1642.
8. When you contact your home state's vital statistics office and ask if they are "online" and they respond, "on what?" you may have a problem.
9. An 1850 census record showing all 12 children in a family proves only that your ancestors did not believe in birth control.
10. Work from the known to the unknown. In other words, just because your name is Washington doesn't mean you are related to George.
11. With any luck, some of the people in your family could read and write--and may have left something written about themselves.
12. It ain't history until it's written down. (See #19.)
13. A genealogist needs to be a detective. Just gimme da facts, Ma'am.
14. Always interview brothers and sisters together in the same room. Since they can't agree on anything about the family tree, it makes for great fun to see who throws the first punch.
15. The genealogy book you just found out about went out of print last week.

16. A good genealogical event is learning that your parents really were married.
17. Finding the place where a person lived may lead to finding that person's arrest record.
18. It's really quite simple: first, you start with yourself, then your parents, then your grandparents. Then you QUIT--and start teaching classes in genealogy.
19. If it's not written down, it ain't history yet. (See #12.)
20. In spite of MTV, computer games, or skate boards, there is always a chance that your grandchildren will learn how to read someday.
21. "To understand the living, you have to commune with the dead, but don't commune with the dead so long that you forget that you are living!" (From "Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil" by John Berendt.)
22. It is a known fact that St. Peter checks all your Family Group Sheets for accuracy before you are allowed to enter the Pearly Gates.
23. Locating the county where your ancestor lived is the first step in finding records about the time he was hauled into court for shooting his neighbor's dog, threatening the census taker with a shotgun, or making illegal corn whiskey behind the barn.
24. A cousin, once removed, may not return.
25. When going to another town for genealogical research, you will always find information on the ancestor for whom you brought no notes.
26. When in a courthouse miles from home, you will always find the breakthrough court record at 4:55pm on Friday afternoon.
27. Research in one county that leads you to information in another county will only be revealed on the last day of your vacation.
28. The tombstone you want to find is always located in the extreme opposite corner of the cemetery from where you started your search.
29. The page on the census where your ancestor's town was enumerated has no page number.
30. That cemetery in Missouri where your great-grandparents were buried is now called Interstate 70.
31. The 1892 newspaper article describing your ancestor as a child winning the grade school spelling bee will misspell her name.
32. Your ancestor will be featured in the county history because he was the first prisoner in the new jail.
33. Your ancestor moved frequently and sold all of his property to his children before he died to avoid probate.
34. The query you found in an old magazine was placed by an unknown cousin--who died two years ago.

35. The courthouse containing the information crucial to your research is always closed for renovation on the day you arrive.
36. The roll of microfilm you need for county research is the only roll in the drawer that was sent out for repair earlier that day.
37. The post office shown on the census page where your ancestors are listed is for a town that does not appear on any known map ever published.
38. The oldest living person in the county has never heard of your ancestor, who lived there years ago.
39. Genealogy is the examination of the maximum amount of data in the maximum amount of time for a minimum result.
40. If you find a query in an old periodical giving two related names for which you are searching, it will be a query that you placed yourself four years ago and forgot about.
41. You always receive more e-mail about your ancestors the day before you are scheduled to go on vacation.
42. If you took Family Group Sheets to the last wedding you attended, you probably are an addicted genealogist.
43. If you can remember your ancestors' marriage dates but not your own, you probably are an addicted genealogist.
44. Genealogy is an addiction with no cure and for which no 12-step program is available.
45. I'm crazy about genealogy, but not necessarily yours.