

**Not an expensive hobby**

# Tracing your family tree an addiction, author says

**By LORI TAYLOR**  
Herald Staff Writer

Researching your family background is an addiction but a lot less dangerous and expensive than tobacco and liquor, author Angus Baxter told a group of would-be genealogists last week.

Mr. Baxter, author of a book called "In Search of Your Roots—a Guide for Canadians Seeking Their Ancestors", addressed a group of interested people at Cedarvale in an evening sponsored by the Halton Hills Library.

Mr. Baxter's book is a guide to the sources of information available to people trying to trace their family history, either in North America or in Europe. During the course of his talk, he outlined briefly some of these sources of information.

Mr. Baxter said the two most common questions he hears from people considering searching for their ancestors are: "How much will it cost and 'How far back will I be able to go?'"

**200 YEARS**  
With any reasonable luck, you should be able to go back about 200 years—250 is about average," Mr. Baxter said. "The cost will be a maximum of \$250 or \$300, and you can control how much you spend. You can say, 'Hey I'm spending too much on this', and you can stop."

There is only one way to trace your family, Mr. Baxter said, and that's to start with yourself and go backwards. There's no point in picking a famous person from history with the same last name and trying to prove he's your ancestor, because it won't work.

"Talk to anyone you can in your family and find out what they know or what they've heard," Mr. Baxter said. "Write everything down as soon as you're told, and don't trust your memory."

"Women are the custodians of family history," he continued. "They know far more than any man about everything that's happened to the family. If you find an elderly aunt you've got it made. You'll not only have her knowledge, you'll have what she heard from her mother and grandmother."

Mr. Baxter warned against believing totally in stories handed down through the family.

**FAMILY STORIES**  
"Write down family stories, but don't necessarily believe them. I'm not suggesting your family for generations has been congenital liars, but stories tend to get decorated. What was really a small cottage becomes a 25-room house. Don't discount them, but don't believe them to be totally true either."

Family Bibles and family photo albums are good sources of information on family events, names and dates, Mr. Baxter said. At one time it was fashionable to give a newlywed couple a Bible to record the big events in the family they were starting.

"You won't find out much about your ancestors, whether they were saints or sinners, unless they were written up in a local history book," Mr. Baxter said. "You'll know when they were born, who they married, their children, when they died, what land they owned, maybe how much money they had."

As an encouragement to would-be genealogists, Mr. Baxter described his own circumstances, which are about as daunting as could face someone trying to trace his ancestors. His father died when Mr. Baxter was four years old, his grandfather a year later. He had no elderly relatives, he was an only child and his cousins were all several times removed. Even so, he managed to trace his family

back 600 years.  
**CIVIL REGISTRATION**  
The first source of information in Ontario is Civil Registration, which is housed at

Queen's Park. This is where information on births, marriages and deaths is kept, back to 1873, when civil registration became law.

Prior to 1873, this type of information is available from church records, the locations of which vary with the different denominations. Public records of cemeteries and tombstones are also sources of information, because they often list the place of birth as well as birth date and the name of the person's spouse.

Another source of information is wills, but it is rare to find wills in Ontario, although they go back to about 1796. They're rare, simply because unless someone had property or knew they were dying, they didn't bother making out a will, Mr. Baxter said. If the family was in agreement as to how the property was to be divided, they didn't bother to get the will probated if there was one.

**CENSUS**  
There are census materials available from the years 1851, 1861, 1871 and 1881, which have extensive information about each person under the roof the day of the census.

More modern census material is sealed to protect the privacy of persons still living.

The censuses are available in the provincial archives, Mr. Baxter said. All that's needed is an address of some kind. In the country, knowing the township is enough. In the city, a street name would be needed. Local libraries are useful, because someone may have completed research on a family already and lodged a copy of the research with the library in a community where it would be of interest, Mr. Baxter said. He said the Meaford Library, for example, has extensive information about the early settlers of the community com-

plied by a resident and donated to the library.

Doing research on ancestors overseas doesn't mean rushing to "the old country", Mr. Baxter said, and he advised being thorough in preparation before leaving Canada. He suggested making sure exactly where the records are kept before leaving Canada.

**RECORDS OFFICES**  
It's not necessary to leave the country, however, because much information is available by writing records offices in Europe, provided the inquiring

party covers the cost of the return postage.

Another possible source of information is distant relatives, Mr. Baxter said. He proposed writing to the local newspaper in the area where one's ancestors were settled and asking for anyone descended from that branch of the family to send any information they have.

Mr. Baxter showed a pistol dating from the 1700's, belonging to a cousin of an ancestor of his wife's. The man had been part of an uprising which had

attempted to overthrow King George I. and when the uprising failed and he was captured, he escaped, taking the pistol along with him. He returned to the family farm, and when the army came looking for him, he hid out in a secret hiding place in the barn.

In later years, the owners of the farm tore down the barn

and discovered the pistol. Mr. Baxter had already made the acquaintance of the owners, and they gave him the pistol. "You may not find many souvenirs during your search," he said. "You may find oil paintings, or old photographs, or old letters. These are the things that put leaves on the family tree."



Angus Baxter, author of the book "In Search of Your Roots", shows a souvenir of his genealogical research. Mr. Baxter talked about the various sources of information available for people trying to trace their family tree. (Herald photo)

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**More volunteers are needed**

**By DEE BUTWELL**  
The executive members of the Halton Hills Unit of the Cancer Society met on September 23 for their monthly business meeting.

The Acton branch will host the annual meeting on October 28.

Barbara Skinner, President, discussed the immediate problem facing the unit, which is one of finding new volunteers to assist in the very important programs of education, service to patients, and campaign. Excellent training is provided for new recruits. If anyone wishes to become a volunteer and become involved in serving our community as a Cancer Society member, please call the Society's office at 877-1124.

Norma Carlisle informed members that the Knitting Activity group has met, and is very well organized for knitting, macramé, and craft projects.

Commemoration Funds Chairman, Cynthia Green, reported that to date in 1980, \$12,620.43 has been donated to our unit and branch through beguets and in memoriams.

Thanks were expressed to those volunteers who had worked at the Society's educational booth at the C.N.E. by Mary-Ellen Bridge, Education Chairman.

Claudette Smith, campaign chairman, stated that the Terry Fox Marathon of Hope fund now totals a very impressive \$27,000.00 in Halton Hills. The people of our area are to be praised and sincerely thanked for their extremely generous and all-out support of Terry's dream - to raise \$22 million for cancer research. Terry has touched the heart and pocketbook of everyone in Halton Hills.

To date, \$78,000.00 has been raised during the 1980 campaign, which is well over our target of \$38,000.00. This outstanding achievement is certainly due to the hard work of hundreds of dedicated campaign volunteers; the continued strong financial support from The Halton Hills people; and the wonderful coverage and support given to many society activities throughout the year by The Herald.

The Celly Puppet Show will be appearing in public schools very soon, as part of the primary education program.

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