

Wednesday, January 26, 2008

Something about Mary

Time is an unworthy friend. It playfully tatters the much-needed memories of your oldest relative with absent-minded splotches of uncertainty and senility; as easily as it tastefully ferments grapes into fine wines and slowly embroiders Histories and Legends into Myth.

Over Time, participants in major events pass on, as do witnesses to these life events. When all are gone, their memories, if recorded, become history; but if close friends and progeny were fortunate enough to hear the stories of their life experiences, they would still live on, in some-what embellished re-tellings.

Oral histories have grown like this over many years, and in some cases, many generations. Some old soldiers' war stories and fishermen's tales for example, have grown into legendary and mythical proportions with every re-telling. It is in these situations, where family historians and genealogists have a very difficult time: finding the proof regarding the truth of the event, and yet still retain the wide-eyed child-like enjoyment of the colourful commentary in the remainder.

Sometimes, the facts are all present in the re-telling, they merely become twisted and meshed together.

It is important to remember four things when it comes to story-telling:

[1] It is normally a much older generation telling stories to a far younger audience.

[2] The older the story, the more difficult it may be for the subject to recall it clearly.

[3] The younger the audience, the shorter their attention span and usually their interest.

[4] The changes in word definitions over the years. As an example, the words "cool," "heavy" and "gay" regularly referred to mild temperatures, excessive weight burdens and a cheerfully pleasant individual; but since the 1950s new meanings developed, creating entirely different connotations. "Cool" would be used in a complimentary remark; "heavy" would be an atypical response to a more serious situation, while "gay" would be a condescending insult to one's personal being. But the term "gay" in most recent slang usage (2009) has also taken on the meaning of complete disgust or disapproval. Situations such as these needs to be kept in mind when referring to documentation from another time period, as an overlooked answer may very well be hidden in the context the terms were used rather than how those words are now perceived.

Allow me to start with what we know:

[1] Mary (nee ATKINSON) [1m.BRUNSKILL][2m.SHAW] died 28AUG1877¹

Her death register is listed as SHAW rather than SOLTON; so her last marriage would seem to be to Lancelot SHAW.

Now, this does not disprove that she was married three times; it only clarifies that the mysterious Mr. SOLTON was not her third husband.

[2] Thomas BRUNSKILL died 27APR1846 in Weston, Ontario; and within 16 months, Mary wed Lancelot SHAW on 14AUG1847 in Toronto.²

With this bit of information, and the fact that Mary was listed as SHAW at her death, there are two possibilities:

Either [i] Mary wed the mysterious Mr. SOLTON before she married Lancelot SHAW;

or [ii] she married Mr. SOLTON before she married Thomas BRUNSKILL.

So, it is possible that Mr. SOLTON is either her first or second husband, but let us consider this:

It is important to remember the 1966 original book³ never did identify the names of Mary's six children that were born in England, prior to the journey to Canada; as well, three of these unknown little darlings died enroute.

What if it had been presumed that all the children were BRUNSKILLS, because our researchers had not located any documentation whatsoever to provide a clearer picture?

This assumption could easily carry on over generations, re-written and re-written again, without question, to present day and accepted as fact -- but, what if Mary's six little ones were born as SOLTONs rather than BRUNSKILLs?

This could possibly make the child that Mary was carrying in 1833, the first-born child to her and Thomas BRUNSKILL rather than their seventh child.

Assumptions were made by the census-taker during the 1852 Census, which will be discussed later in detail.

Now, as you ponder that, let's start with our first hypothesis-- Mary wed SOLTON before SHAW:

If she married SOLTON, he would have had to have died soon after, in order for her to marry SHAW by 14AUG1847.

Furthermore, the marriage register would have been listed between Mary SOLTON & Lancelot SHAW, rather than Mary BRUNSKILL & Lancelot SHAW.

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What we found was the latter:

Reverend H.J. GRASETT performed a marriage on August 14th, 1847 between widower, Lancelot SHAW of Chinguacousy Township and widow, Mary BRUNSKILL of Etobicoke Township.

Five years later, the Canadian Census of 1852 lists Lancelot and Mary with three children, aged 14, 12, and nine years of age⁴ but after further research, these three children were actually BRUNSKILLS and well-documented from Mary's earlier marriage to the late Thomas BRUNSKILL.

Therefore, Mary's husband Lancelot SHAW was her last marriage, and Thomas BRUNSKILL was her husband in the marriage immediately previous to SHAW. This leaves us with one probability that Mary possibly wed Mr. SOLTON before both BRUNSKILL & SHAW.

Now, as simple as this may sound, there is a complicated issue involving Mary's maternal grandmother. Yes, the mother of Elizabeth (nee HODGSON) ATKINSON, namely Ann (nee ROBINSON)[1m.HODGSON][2m.BRUNSKILL].

Following the death of Elizabeth's father, Robert HODGSON (C1781), Ann re-married, to Wharton BRUNSKILL

But to obtain the oddest piece to this incomplete genealogical puzzle, you must look into Mary's paternal grandmother, Bethia KIDD, wife of Thomas ATKINSON, as well. Bethia came to Canada a few years before the ATKINSONS, travelling in the company of her siblings and parents, Richard KIDD and Jane (nee SOLTON) KIDD.

Consider this gamut of surnames carefully, as you put yourself into Mary's situation:

It is 1852. You live on a small acreage in a one-story log cabin in Canada West (Ontario). You are a mother of eleven children, six surviving of which three are married and off with families of their own. Your husband, Thomas dies, you mourn and re-marry, all before your youngest child turns five-years-old. Your youngest three children live with you and your new husband, then you re-live the anguish again – you outlive your second husband and must bury him also. You have spent the majority of your years as a single parent and a pioneer farmer; and in order to provide for your family from your land, you need help. Your children that are still at home are too young and need constant supervision – so who do you turn to? Family – your older children, your parents, your grandparents, your siblings and their older children, among other relatives.

Now, my dear Cousins, I need to bother you, yet again (provided I have not lost you completely), to look up a few things:

[1] Death register for Lancelot SHAW b.C1793 d. == aft.1852-bef.1877 ==

[2] Marriage registers for Mary SHAW to a Mr. SOLTON m. bef.AUG1877

To disprove, in addition to [1] that Mary did not wed a SOLTON after SHAW

[3] Birth register for Elizabeth Isabelle (or Isabella) BRUNSKILL b.04MAY1848

Please verify if there was or not a birth for the same child with surname SHAW

[4] Birth register for William John BRUNSKILL b.1842

Please verify if there was or not a birth for the same child with surname SHAW

[5] Birth register for Mary Jane BRUNSKILL b.1840

Please verify if there was or not a birth for the same child with surname SHAW

During your search, let me know either way if the search is negative/empty.

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Footnotes:

¹ Transcript of death register for Mary (ATKINSON) [BRUNSKILL] SHAW d.28AUG1877 Informant: William John BRUNSKILL, son

² Marriage Registers of St. James Anglican Church/Cathedral, York (Toronto), 1800 to 1896, as recorded in "Landmarks of Toronto", volume3, pp.395 ff., by John Ross Robertson (including biographical notations on some individuals and families by J.R.R.)

Marriages Performed by Rev. H.J. GRASETT, Rector of St. James, 14 August 1847, by license, Lancelot SHAW, of the township of Chinguacousy, widower, and Mary BRUNSKILL, of the township of Etobicoke.

³ Allan Smith (compiler) & Mildred Reid-Atkinson, The Atkinson Genealogy, (TAG – privately published, Schomberg, ON, 1966), sources not cited within publication.

⁴ 1852 Census, of Canada West (Ontario), York County 2, Etobicoke Twp 407, Schedule A, page 131, line 27, roll NAC#11761

1852 Census of Canada West							
(Ontario), York County 2, Etobicoke Twp 407, Schedule A, page 131, line 27							
Roll NAC#11761 National Archives of Canada							
Christian name(s)	Surname	occupation	birthplace	Religion	Age	Gender	
Lancelot	SHAW	farmer	England	Presbyterian	59 (b.C1793)	male	
Mary	SHAW		England	Presbyterian	50 (b.C1802)	female	
Elizah F Isabelle	SHAW		Canada	Presbyterian	14 (b.C1838)	female	**COR
Mary	SHAW		Canada	Presbyterian	12 (b.C1840)	female	**COR
William John	SHAW		Canada	Presbyterian	9 (b.C1843)	male	**COR
John	ATKINSON		England	CoE	74 (b.C1778)	male	
Elizah	ATKINSON		England	CoE	78 (b.C1774)	female	

CoE = Church of England

**Elizabeth Isabella BRUNSKILL b.04MAY1838

**Mary Jane BRUNSKILL b.15OCT1840

**William John BRUNSKILL b.1842