

Finding “Hidden Lists” with Valuable and Unexpected Genealogical Information

David A. Norris offers tips on how to better utilize the information found in lists

LISTS ARE GREAT BUILDING blocks for genealogical research. Finding ancestors on ship passenger lists, military muster, and tax rolls can provide vital links in a family history.

Beyond an array of widely-available and well-publicized lists lies a world in what one might call “hidden lists”. Tallies of names compiled for many purposes hide in early newspapers, county court records, legislative volumes, and other sources. Finding such lists and sifting the information found in them can reveal some true surprises. The lists can be highly specific indeed, perhaps revealing when an ancestor stepped off a stagecoach and signed a hotel register; obtained a liquor license; or perhaps even saw one of the first giraffes shown in North America. Often, there aren’t enough names in these elusive lists to make them into new genealogical publications, so the lists stay hidden. We’ll look at some of these lists and consider some ways to tailor a search for them that might enrich your own genealogy research.

Newspapers had local lists that collected countless thousands of names. For instance, it was common to see them print names of new hotel guests, or passengers arriving by steamship in coastal towns. Although I have not seen

LIST OF LETTERS	
Remain on hand at the Post-Office, Fayetteville, 1st of July, 1803, which will be sent to the General Post-Office as dead Letters, unless called for previous to the 1st of October next.	
(B) JOHN Buckingham, Fayetteville,	1
Thomas Byrne, Ditto,	1
Jerard Benham, Do,	2
Lewis Brown, Do,	1
Duncan Black, Cumberland County,	1
Donald Blue, Do, Do,	1
Gilbert Boie, Moore County,	1
(C) John Cole, Cumberland County,	2
John Clarke, Sen. Do, Do,	1
(D) Archibald Davis, Esq, Fayetteville,	1
Thomas Davis, Do,	1
Rachael Deckersaneer, Cumberland County,	1
(F) Huribert Farrington, Fayetteville,	1
(G) Widow Graham, Little Rockfish,	1
John Graham, Cumberland County,	1
Fullie Gubrecht, Do, Do,	1
(H) Jason Hart, Fayetteville,	2
Amrose Hochkers, Do,	1
William Hamington, Do,	5
Samuel Hibernson, Do,	2
(I) John Scott Jordan, Fayetteville,	1
Elihu S. Jones, Do,	1
Rev. James Jenken, Do,	1
William Jones, Do,	1
The Hon. Judge of Fayetteville,	1
(K) Michael Kenan, Fayetteville,	1
(L) Margaret Leonard, Fayetteville,	1
Alexander Leach, Cumberland County,	1
(M) Daniel MacPhail, Robeson County,	1
Alexander MacLeod, Richmond County,	1
John MacPherson, Constable, Fayetteville,	1
Donald Munroe, Cumberland County,	1
Neil MacPhail, Do, Do,	1
Donald MacArthur, Do, Do,	1
Thomas Memeery, Fayetteville,	2
James Marsh, Do,	1
Archibald MacIntagard, Do,	1
John Murphy, care of K. Campbell, Do,	1
John MacAllister, near Fayetteville,	1
Nicoll M'Inyre, Cumberland County,	1
Archibald M'Millan, Richmond County,	1
Margaret M'Ray, Cumberland County,	1
Duncan M'Millan, Robeson County,	1
John M'Comack, Cumberland County,	1
Neill M'Alpin, Robeson County,	1
Donald M'Lean, care of Duncan M'Farlane,	1
Duncan M'Furlane, Laurel Hill,	1
(N) James Naughtington, Cumberland County,	1
(O) Col. Thomas Owen, Bladen,	1
Francis Owen, Fayetteville,	1
(P) Doct. John H. Pearce, Fayetteville,	1
Alexander Patterson, near Do,	2
Hugh Porter, (Precher) Do,	1
John Pharis, near Do,	1
(S) Sheriff of Cumberland County,	1
John Shaw, Do, Do,	1
(T) Frederick Tourville, Fayetteville,	1
James Torry, Cumberland County,	2
William Trappel, Do, Do,	1
(W) Neill Wilkison, Cumberland County,	1
John Wilks, near Fayetteville,	1
Littleberry Wilson, Fayetteville Jail,	1
DUNCAN M'RAE, P. M.	

This list of unclaimed letters was in the Raleigh Minerva, or Anti-Jacobin on 22 August, 1803. (North Carolina Newspapers)

lists of train passengers, I have run across Western newspapers that listed passengers arriving in town by stagecoach.

Until the mid-19th century (and later in rural areas), people had to pick up their mail at the post office because there was no mail delivery to homes or businesses. Names on unclaimed letters appeared in newspaper columns. Occasionally, one also sees lists of “un-mailable” letters languishing in the post office, perhaps for lack of postage or a partially omitted address.

If the tax records of an ancestor’s county are missing, portions of them might be available through newspapers. It’s not uncommon at all to find long lists of delinquent taxpayers, perhaps with the names sorted by locations such as townships or city wards.

Congress passed a “Direct Tax” in 1798, to finance the Quasi-War with France. Dropped in 1802, the direct tax returned in 1812 to finance the new war with Great Britain. They repealed the tax in 1817. Most tax rolls from these levies have been lost; a few fragments of these records can be found at Ancestry.com and other sources. For some states, useful (although partial) substitutes appear as newspaper lists of delinquent payers for the War of 1812 taxes.