

Finding Family – January 2018
Using Old Family Bibles for Documentation
By Ruth Jenkins-McIntire

Years ago, I was given copies of handwritten bible pages listing births, deaths, & marriage dates for my 3rd great grandparents, their children and their grandchildren. This family had lived near Greeneville, TN in the mid 1800's. These pages were very helpful since they were accepted as documentation by lineage societies, allowing me to prove information about three generations of my Davis line. Before 1900, there were not many places where these events were recorded. Some were found in church records, town records, and family bibles. When I received the copies, I wondered where the bible was that the information was taken from. I was told that a genealogist hired by someone in the family had found the copies in records at the Daughters of the American Revolution library in Washington D.C. When using bible records for documentation, most societies want you to include the title page of the bible as well. It was not included with the pages I received.

The title page usually has the copyright date and the date should precede the family dates listed in the bible. Most of the time, events were recorded in bibles as they happened. Another thing to look for would be the use of different inks and sometimes different handwriting. This makes sense because not all dates were entered at the same time nor by the same person.

I now had more reason to want to find that bible! It did seem a farfetched possibility because so many old family treasures are thrown away by people who see no value in them once elder family members have passed on.

At one point, I met a second cousin, Carolyn, who said she had an old family bible somewhere in her basement, but she did not know which side of the family it was from. She invited me to come to Denver to see it. At that time I hoped that I would be able to visit her sometime in the future.

Carolyn called me earlier this year and told me that she had moved to a smaller place. She had friends who had packed up the items in her basement, including a couple of bibles. I figured I really needed to go and see what family treasures she had. As we were planning a trip to the east coast, we decided to stop there on our way home.

We finally had a chance to fly to Denver. I was very excited and hoped that one of the bibles she had was the one I was looking for. As I entered her home, I saw that she had laid out the bibles, lots of photos and some old letters on her table and counter. I could see a picture of my great grandfather. I only had a poor quality photocopy of it. I picked up an old bible and searched through it to see if I could find pages with handwritten family information. Often these pages are somewhere in the middle of the bible and are easy to miss. Searching the bible carefully I found the handwritten pages I was looking for. The bible's title page listed 1829 as the copyright date! My 2nd great grandparents were married in 1836 so I believe the bible may have been theirs. Joy and excitement filled my body as I held this family treasure and knew that it had been held lovingly many times by my ancestors. Standing there in Carolyn's home looking at all of the family treasures, I was overwhelmed!

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I asked Carolyn if we could take the items to a place where I could scan the pictures and the bible pages. She told me that I could have anything I wanted! She was glad to find someone interested in having them and I was thrilled to get them! My Genealogist heart was full!