

The
Wow

e-newsletter

by Ken and Dahlynn McKowen

Principles

Volume 4 No. 10 October 2008

www.PublishingSyndicate.com

History Retold

If any of your writing involves history, whether cultural or natural, I have a question for you to ponder: How do you determine the accuracy of what you are “retelling” to your readers? Whenever you include descriptions of historic events, buildings or artifacts, or plant and animal identifications and their scientific names in your stories, accuracy is critical. Get something wrong in a published piece and I can guarantee that any number of people will happily point out your mistake. And such mistakes do not enhance your reputation as a writer.

So how do you guarantee the accuracy of your manuscripts’ facts? If you are a historical researcher, you depend on “primary” sources. Personal diaries and letters and official government documents such as deeds, marriage licenses and court orders fall into this category. “Secondary” sources, such as historical newspaper accounts, can be quite helpful; however, be aware that any newspaper’s story accuracy (whether historical or contemporary) could easily have been distorted at several levels. You are assuming that the reporter’s ability to research and write the original story based only on personal observation or interviews of those “who were there” is factual. If we had a couple of more hands each, Dahlynn and I could count on our fingers the number of times newspaper reporters have misquoted us over the years. And remember that eye-witness accounts are often notoriously inaccurate. What people “see and hear” is based on perceptions and different people will have different perceptions of the same event.

Continue on page two



Bostonians boast that this is the grave of Mary Goose (died 1690). We checked their claim; see page four.

P . S . 

Published by *Publishing Syndicate*
Editor: Ken McKowen
info@PublishingSyndicate.com
Copyright 2008
All Rights Reserved

History Retold

Continued from page one

Then you have the editor's credibility: Was there a professional code that required maintaining or confirming a reporter's accuracy, or attempts, such as during the Yellow Journalism days of the late 1890s (akin to today's tabloids), to exaggerate or distort facts in order to sell more copies?

Unfortunately, most of us who write about historical places and events do not have the luxury of being able to spend hundreds of hours and thousands of dollars rooting out primary sources. We depend on other books or people to provide the basic grist for our stories. So I'll pose my question once again: How do you determine the accuracy of your sources? That generally depends a great deal on what you are writing about.

If you're visiting a destination, you might get your information from guides who lead tours—but be careful. At many historic homes or sites, docents (most often, they're well trained and knowledgeable volunteers) give the requisite tours, but occasionally a few will have fun with the facts to be more entertaining. Not long ago while revisiting a historic home I had first toured many years earlier, the docent talked about the daughter of the builder and her involvement in managing the family's summer refuge, which I knew was misinformation.

If you are depending on a guided tour for all or most of your article's facts, you likely will want to talk with the site's curator or director, as I did, in order to confirm the accuracy of your story, especially if you suspect something just doesn't sound right.

Another thing to keep in mind when writing history is the accuracy of place-name spellings. Early spellings were often based on how words sounded, not on any set rules. For example, historic Plymouth, Massachusetts, was originally spelled "Plimoth." You'll find the original spelling used at the wonderful Plimoth Plantation, a



Plimoth Plantation, Plymouth, MA

*Plimoth Plantation "resident"
(actors stay in character based
on life in the 1600s)*



Continue on page three

History Retold

Continued from page two



Bodie, California

reenactment destination, located in Plymouth. And the historic town of Bodie, California, was originally “Body.” The spelling was supposedly changed (speculation only, but a good story) to “Bodie” (which rhymes with “roadie”), because the original spelling was too easily mispronounced to reflect what remained in the streets nearly every morning, following the gold-mining town’s notorious nighttime drunken revelry. It’s generally better to go with today’s contemporary spellings, perhaps with an explanation about the original spelling.

Fortunately, much of Americana has been so well documented that you can generally depend on the accuracy of basic facts (such as when historical figures did historic things), or when historic buildings were first constructed or had major repairs or changes made, such as the Old North Church in Boston. Much of this kind of information can be found in the publications sold at most historic sites. The better publications list bibliographies of their primary and secondary sources. Or you can contact a site’s historian/curator to confirm the accuracy of any related facts you may want to use.

Warning: Beware of the Internet. It’s a great place to do research, but it’s no more accurate than any other secondary or tertiary source. Even sites such as Wikipedia, that maintain some level of editorial control, can have info changed by those wishing to tweak history a bit to suit their own needs and perceptions.

It’s up to you to determine the accuracy of your writing, whether it be travel articles or historical novels. If your published works aren’t the kind that require the inclusion of bibliographies, then you should be able to back all of your facts with sources, if you’re asked—and some publishers will do exactly that. And should you get sloppy or lazy with your research, you’ll get caught by those who revel in “gothchas”—guaranteed!



*Old North Church, Boston:
The home of “One if by
land, two if by sea.”*

P.S. Profiles: Writers and Authors

Terri Elders from Colville, Washington

“Though I’d been writing since I was a child, and publishing author interviews, book reviews, pop psychology and travel pieces, I’d rarely written about my personal experiences. I hadn’t even considered anthologies until I read an issue of the McKowen’s WOW Principles Newsletter.

“My first anthology story was “Easter Bloomers” for *Chicken Soup for the Soul: Celebrating Brothers and Sisters*, edited by Ken and Dahlynn. Since its publication just a year ago, I have been accepted by ten more editors. My friends and family are loving reading about themselves, and I’m enjoying getting paid for my memoirs, one story at a time.” —Terri Elders, Colville, WA



Ken and Terri--he stopped by for a visit during his research for our latest travel book

The Real Story of Mother Goose?



There are many stories as to the identity of the beloved “Mother Goose.” During our trip to Boston this month, we visited the Granary Burying Ground (est. 1660). Mary (Balston) Goose (ca. 1648-1690) is buried there with many other notables, including John Hancock, Samuel Adams and Paul Revere. Research shows that Mary Goose gave birth to at least 10 children with her husband, Isaac Goose (d. 1710). After Mary’s death, her husband married Elizabeth Foster and they had five children. Here’s where our fact-checking has run into problems: many sources state that Isaac and Elizabeth’s daughter—also named Elizabeth—married Thomas Fleet, the publisher of the *Boston Evening Post*, and it was the younger Elizabeth who was the real Mother Goose. But other sources state it was the elder Elizabeth. But our sources agree that Fleet was the first publisher of Mother Goose stories, even though no copy of the book has ever been found to verify this account. With all the twists and turns, Mother Goose would have loved writing a rhyme to this tall tale!

HOT STUFF! HOT STUFF! HOT STUFF! HOT STUFF! HOT STUFF!

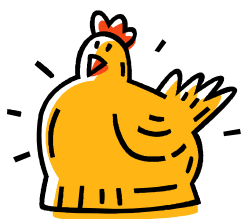


A Message from Publishing Syndicate

Things are fairly slow this time of year for anthology story collection, and you'll notice below that the postings are the same as they were last month. The publishing business has taken a very hard hit due to the economy (and we know this firsthand due to our dwindling royalty checks); disposable income is going toward bills and living expenses. But don't dismay--hopefully we'll have some new listings for you next month, once the anthology series have a better grasp on their release calendar for the back half of 2009.

Chicken Soup for the Soul

www.ChickenSoup.com



College Campus Chronicles: Deadline: Dec. 31, 2008

Extraordinary Teens: Deadline: December 31, 2008

Learning From Our Cats: Deadline: January 31, 2009

Learning From Our Dogs: Deadline: January 31, 2009



A Cup of Comfort

www.CupofComfort.com



Dog Lovers II: Deadline: December 15, 2008

Grieving Heart: Deadline: February 1, 2009

For Fathers: Deadline: March 1, 2009



Literary Cottage

www.literarycottage.com



Literary Cottage has no current story call-outs as of this writing; please check their website for any new postings. Thanks.



Go for it! Get published!