

The Wow Principles

e-newsletter

by Ken and Dahlynn McKowen

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Due to the sheer craziness of releasing three new NYMB books in two months' time and the madness of three simultaneous national book media campaigns, we are regifting a past Wow Principles' article. The following article is from October 2008.

For those of you who are new to the Wow Principles' family, we'd like to say welcome and also make you aware of the 80+ back issues of our newsletter. These back issues, which cover all facets of the publishing industry and writing world, are available on the Publishing Syndicate website for your reading pleasure.

Happy holidays from all of us here at Publishing Syndicate!



History Retold

By Ken McKowen

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 even use 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'll depend on primary sources such as personal diaries, letters and official government documents such as deeds, marriage licenses and court orders.

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Bodie, California (see reference to town on page 3)



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History Retold

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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.



Let me explain. By using historical newspaper accounts, 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 indeed factual. 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. And then you have the newspaper's editor's credibility: Was there a professional code that required maintaining or confirming a reporter's accuracy,

especially during the Yellow Journalism days of the late 1890s (akin to today's tabloids), thus allowing exaggeration or distortion of the 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 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.



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Plimoth Plantation resident (actors stay in character based on life in the 1600s); Plantation home to the 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 reenactment destination, located in Plymouth. And the historic gold-mining town of Bodie, California, was originally “Body.” The spelling was supposedly changed (speculation only, but a good story) to “Bodie,” which rhymes with “roadie.” This was done because the original spelling was too easily mispronounced as “body,” thus reflecting what remained in the streets of the historic town nearly every morning, following the notorious drunken revelries that occurred each night. 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. The old church, pictured to the left, is the home of “One if by land, two if by sea.” 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, which maintain some level of editorial control, can have information changed by those wishing to tweak history a bit to suit their own needs and perceptions.

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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, you must be able to back all of your facts with sources, if you're asked, and the good 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!

The Real Story of Mother Goose?

There are many stories as to the identity of the beloved Mother Goose. During a trip to Boston, 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 ran into some issues: 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. 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!



Bostonians boast that this is the grave of Mary Goose (died 1690). Are they correct? Or is it an old wives' tale?



Note: with the exception of the "oops" photo, all photos in this article were taken by Dahlynn and Ken McKowen, during their many adventures as full-time travel writers.

What Have NYMB Contributors Learned in 2012?

Diana Amadeo (*NYMB Woman, Stupid Kids and Dogs*): “What I have learned from Publishing Syndicate... specifically *Not Your Mother’s Books*...is that there is a place for writers to publish their true insights and feelings other than the cookie cutter variety of most anthologies. From a writer’s perspective, Publishing Syndicate and NYMB is a gold mine for getting your work out in the reading world.”

Joyce Newman Scott (*NYMB Woman*): “I learned that celebrating the victories of my fellow published writers is as thrilling as being published myself.”

Alice Muschany (*NYMB Woman*): “I’ve learned to check the NYMB homepage for updates/deadlines and to submit even at the last minute, because you might just get lucky and have your story published in an awesome book. Most important, I’ve learned to watch for the next book release. Like Ralphie in *Christmas Story*, I give the NYMB series an A+++!”

Rolland Love (*NYMB Dogs*): “I have learned the amount of effort Publishing Syndicate puts into their short story books shows up big time in the quality stories. I am proud to be a contributing author and look forward to more publications.”

Cappy Hall Rearick (*NYMB Woman*): “[Upon writing my story for the book] I learned a valuable lesson about women in 2012. What is it? That women are funnier than ever. Everyone knows we share many common bonds; having babies, putting up with jerks in the work place, not to mention the ups and downs of having PMS and no license to carry. Women are funny. Women are fun. Women are great writers. Let’s hear it for Sisterhood!”

Sioux Roslawski (*NYMB Woman and Dogs*): “I’ve learned that ‘big’ anthologies are created by the small, personal touches...phone calls and emails back and forth with Dahlynn, co-creators who push to get your story into the final rounds, handwritten rejection notes that are encouraging... You get all that when you’re part of the P.S. family.”

John Reas (*NYMB Stupid Kid and Dogs*): “In today’s litigious age, you, as the writer, are taking the full risk of the story’s truthfulness once you use the names of actual individuals in your story, which is why releases are required before a story can be published.”

John Lesjack (*NYMB Stupid Kid*): “I have learned that their editors work night and day because they have responded to my emails at all hours of the day and night. I’ve also learned that Ken and Dahlynn are kind, sensitive and responsive to all issues presented to them.”

Francine Baldwin-Billingslea (*NYMB Stupid Kid and Dogs*): “PS allows the writer to express him/herself and tell it like it is. They are a publishing company for the unconventional. I’ve learned that I’m not afraid or reluctant to spill the beans in a comical, respectful and appropriate manner. Through my writings, I have been welcomed into the PS family and I’m very proud to be a part of it.”

Karen Gaebelein (*NYMB Woman*): “Believe in your talent to convey a message and get it on paper. Words are important and one’s ability to weave them together to tell a story is a skill that should be cherished and nurtured.”

What can Publishing Syndicate teach you in the coming New Year? Lots, guaranteed. Join us and sign up via our website to receive our free monthly writing/publishing tips newsletter—the *Wow Principles*.

SEND IN YOUR STORIES!

Updated 12/19/12

Not Your Mother's Book . . .

A new anthology for a new century!

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