

How to Estimate Unknown Dates

It is ideal when a document provides the exact birth/christening, marriage, or death/burial date of an ancestor. The Parish Registers do that. But the **Inheritance Claims Records** and the **Notary Records** rarely do.

Many of the **Claims Records** do provide death date of the father or other relative of the claimant, and at times one of those records gives the age of the claimant or of some other involved relative, such as a sibling.

And some of the **Notary Records** provide some specific dates. For instance, some of the marriage settlements indicate how long the couple had been married by that time. Some of the wills or codicils help identifying death dates, or at least the year. And some **Notary Records** indicate the age of some family members. Guardianship records often indicate that some (or all) of the children were minors at the date of the act (meaning, for those times and places, under age 25).

But most of the **Claims Records** and the **Notary Records** do not contain dates for family members who are named in the act. In such cases, you will have to use whatever clues you can find in the acts to help you to *estimate birth and marriage dates* for your ancestors.

Hugh T. Law, the late Family History Library Southwestern Europe specialist who directed the Piedmont Project, studied what they were finding as they neared the end of that project. His study established that, **on average, the typical Waldensian young man was age 24** when he married for the first time, and **on average, the typical Waldensian young woman was age 20** when she first married—about four years younger than her husband. He found also that they typically had their 1st child about a year after they married, making the husband about 25 and his wife about 21 when their first child was born.

Of course, those are *averages*—and that means that there about as many who married *older* than that age as there were who married *younger* than that age.

This system for estimating dates usually works fine. Complications arise, however, if the first **known** child was in fact not the first child actually born to the couple. This could occur if the first child died young and was not included in the records, or if there wasn't sufficient information in the parish registers for the Piedmont Project volunteers to place siblings in the same family. For example, if the mother's maiden name was not given in the birth record of two or more children—thus making it impossible to be sure the children actually were siblings—they appear on separate Piedmont Project family group records. That is due to the Waldensian Naming Pattern.

The result would be that the parents were actually *older* than the estimated dates given in the **Piedmont Project** Family Group Records. In such cases, it is necessary to adjust those estimated dates in order to accommodate the previously born children who were not named in the surviving **Parish Registers**.

And there are cases where the **Notary Records** name children of a couple and some of the older children are not named in the **Parish Registers**—in other words, they didn't survive that difficult period.

There are numerous cases in the Piedmont Project where this occurs, where a man of the same name appears as father of several different families. It was very important, of course, to be accurate in the Piedmont Project, to not list children as siblings unless there was actual evidence that they in fact did have the same parents. The notarial records provide evidence that some shown as separate families in the Piedmont Project are actually members of the same family. But we should make this judgment on a case-by-case basis, using solid documentation for our decisions.

Build on whatever clues you can find in the records about your ancestors in order to estimate birth and marriage dates for them when specific dates are not given in the records.