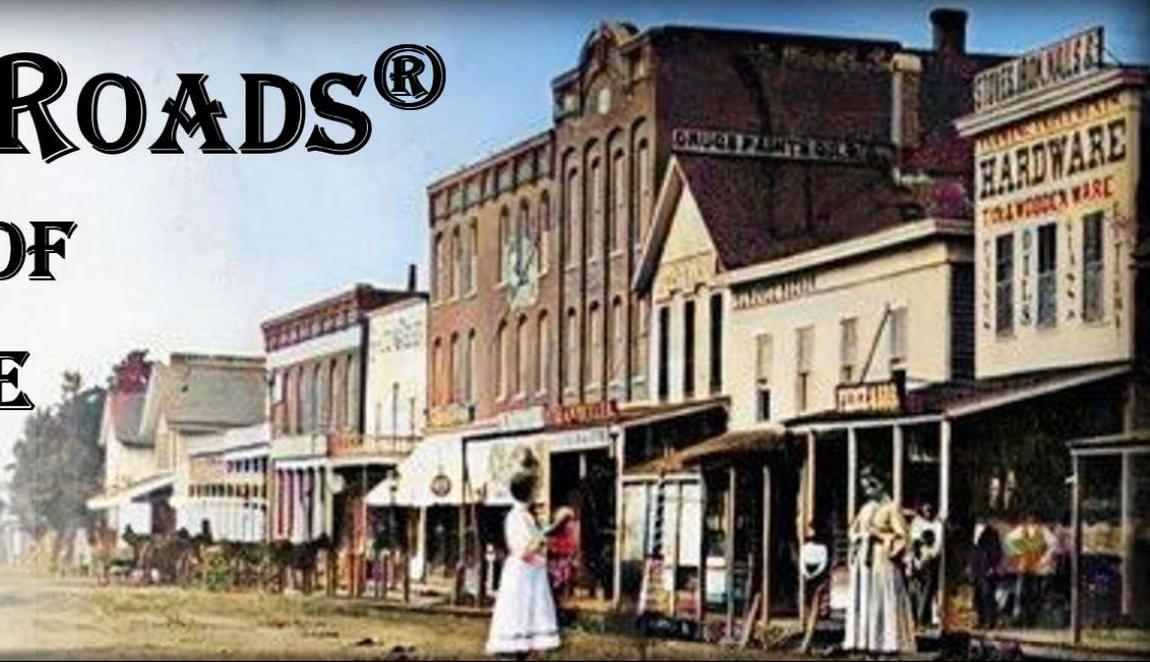


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STORIES OF

KEWANEE

PAST & PRESENT



Dean Karau

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How History Changes with New Information

It's Ok if We Revise our History if It's Based on Facts

(I usually enhance and colorize black & white photos. But because of the subject of today's column, I used black & white photos for the two critical ones. I enhanced three small ones for clarity.)

Wow, what a concept! New information leads to new analyses and new conclusions! What next?

Photo No. 1 is from the Kewanee Historical Society's Photo Gallery on its website. It identifies the



Fred Machesney

With Julia Machesney in the Bottom Photo

Photo No. 1: From the Kewanee Historical Society (Cropped by author).

woman in the front cockpit as Julia Machesney. Well-known Kewanee attorney and amateur photographer Russell T. Neville took the photo.

However, I knew that the caption was clearly wrong. I had previously researched and written a story about Kewanee's celebrated aviator, Fred Machesney. I learned that Fred's wife was Mae, they had no children, and no one in Fred's family tree was named Julia. Mae often flew with Fred, so it made sense that the woman in the photo was Mae. My research revealed that Neville had a daughter, Julia, who had recently graduated from high school at the time of the story. But in my opinion, her high school photo (Photo No. 2) looked



Photo No. 2: Julia Neville's 1924 Kewanee High School graduation photo.

nothing like the woman in the photo, so I was convinced that it could only be Mae in Neville's photo. End of story.

But, as it usually happens, while working on something else, I found Photo No. 3 of Neville and his daughters. When I saw the face of his daughter Julia in the photo, I knew that she was the woman in the plane with Fred in Neville's photo.

To be sure, I used FamilySearch's new Compare-a-Face facial recognition software to compare the photos. The results? There was a 93% likelihood that the woman in the two photos was the same! I then used the software to compare the Neville photo with Julia's high school photo, which found



Russell T. Neville (right), a lawyer by trade from Kewanee, Illinois, was also a photographer. Neville took pictures of the Sand Cave area in July 1925, after the Collins entrapment. He made black-and-white movie footage in several of the area's caves using brightly burning magnesium strips for lighting. From left to right are ? Furlong, Neville's sister Hazel, Wade Highbaugh, Neville's daughter Julia, ? Hanson, and Neville. (Neville Collection, Cave Research Foundation.)

Photo No. 3: Julia Neville, third from the right. From the Neville Collection, Cave Research Foundation.

a 56% likelihood that that the two photos were of Julia – I’m not sure if I would have thought that was dispositive had I used the software at the time I wrote the article on Fred. But it would have at least raised a question for me to explore further.

As a final part of my research, I talked with Dean H. Snyder, president of American Spelean History Association, an organization of cavers, *i.e.*, cave explorers (they prefer the term “caver” over “spe-lunker” when describing themselves). Dean arguably is the preeminent scholar of Russell T. Neville, and he has hundreds of Neville photos and memorabilia. (Neville was a world-famous caver/photographer.) Dean believes with certainty that the woman in the photo is Julia Neville.

I think that’s why I like history. There’s always

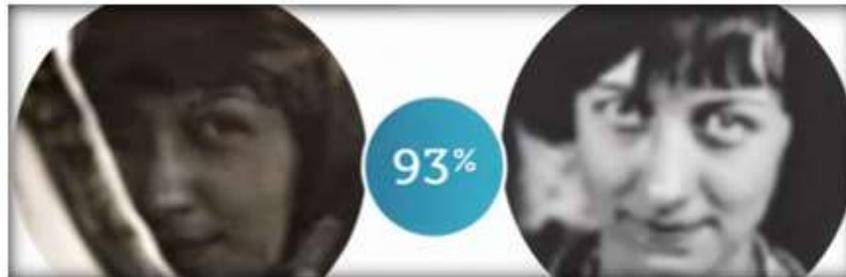
something else lurking out there which can change my analysis. I may not always find it, but when I do,

I don’t mind that my first analysis was wrong. Rather, I revel in the fact that new information has resulted in a more accurate analysis.

Can I be absolutely sure that Neville’s photo of Fred included his daughter Julia? No. But I believe, based on the new information, that it is the most likely possibility.

Now, the Kewanee Historical Society can add more information to the Neville photo so that the next person who would like to rely on it will have the most up-to-date information about the photo.

Change is good if it relies on new facts.



FamilySearch Compare-a-Face comparison of women in Photo Nos. 1 & 3



FamilySearch Compare-a-Face comparison of women in Photo Nos. 1 & 2