

## Genealogy Rocks!

### Medical Terms Used in Old Records

Death records, beginning in the late 1880s, generally provided a cause of death. This gives genealogical researchers clues to the life and challenges of their ancestors. Medical terms for disease vary by time period, geographical location and the education of the physician, undertaker or clerk.



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Diseases are generally identified by signs and symptoms. Many unrelated diseases have the same symptoms - fever, chills, diarrhea and vomiting. The cause of death that was given may simply indicate the nature of the illness prior to death, not the exact cause of death. Epidemics often carried away whole families and communities. The virulent nature of the epidemics left the whole family or community ill, with no one to care for the sick. They wasted away due to dehydration from vomiting and

diarrhea.

Tuberculosis was commonly known as consumption, lung sickness, phthisis or wasting disease in the 1800's. Dropsy is an old term for edema due to congestive heart failure. Bright's Disease was a general term used to mean death caused by some form of kidney failure. Quinsy referred to a severe complication of tonsillitis. Mania or acute mania were terms used to indicate any form of mental illness or dementia. Apoplexy was paralysis due to a stroke. Bad blood referred to syphilis. Chilblains were swelling of the extremities caused by extended exposure to the cold. Epilepsy may have been called falling sickness.

These are just a few of the antiquated terms you may find in your research. Google any others!

❖ *Kathy Patrick is the Vice President, instructor and library volunteer for Larimer County Genealogical Society. Please visit our website ([www.lcgsc.org](http://www.lcgsc.org)) or our Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/lcgsc](http://www.facebook.com/lcgsc)) to learn about genealogy and our monthly events.*