

The Wayback Machine - <http://web.archive.org/web/20000919160548/http://www...>

Custom Dates in Reunion

by [Jan McClintock](#)

Updated 2/17/2000 by Leister Productions.

Any genealogist can testify that dates in family research are anything but rock solid. Not only do we often find dates that are inaccurate, but we often have only a portion of a full date. For instance, consider the following:

- In the nineteenth century
- Mid-nineteenth century
- During the 1840's
- Between 1840 and 1850
- Before 1850
- Circa 1845
- Mid-1845
- July 1845
- 21 July
- Afternoon of 21 July
- Thursday, 21 July 1845, 4:05 p.m.

From the most general to the most specific, these are all expressions of a date. Luckily, Reunion will accept all of the above (and more) in any date field. In addition to maintaining dates for us to see and use in our research, Reunion uses specifically-formatted dates to sort events and calculate ages and other dates. Each time you enter a date, Reunion will either accept it as being specific enough for calculations -- a "valid" date -- or ask if you wish to keep the input as a Custom Date.

Valid date entries are converted (invisibly) by Reunion into whole numbers in order to sort events chronologically and to perform age calculations. A valid date would include at least a month and/or a year (as long as the year is between 3760 BC and 7000 AD!). If you aren't sure of the date, you can enter approximations like "bef 1845" or "circa 1845" or "21 July" or just "July." Please refer to the electronic manual for some other examples of valid approximation entries. [[Help -> Search for Help, "Date expression"](#)]

You can also enter a question mark for all or part of a date and the date will be considered valid (but might not be used to calculate ages): "? Jul 1845" or "? 1845" or just "?." The question mark will always move to the beginning of the date entry, no matter where you enter it. In my own family file, I enter a question mark in the death date field of people I know must be dead, but for whom I have no death date. That at least sets them apart from living family members, and reminds me that I need to find those dates.

If you enter a date that Reunion doesn't understand for calculations, it's still OK. Here is an example of the **Custom Date** box that will appear:

Custom Date

Reunion can't understand the date entry : **mid-July 1848.**

You can either...

- try to enter a date that Reunion understands. [Try Again](#)
- save your date entry as a Custom Date.
However, for date sorting, calculations, and comparisons, Reunion will use the "Sort Date" shown below. You may edit this field.

Sort Date : [Save Custom Date](#)

Remember, you can enter anything in a Date field. However, the **Sort Date** field in the Custom Date box is your chance to enter a date that Reunion *can* use for calculations, even if your Custom Date is less specific. For example, if your custom date is "During the Civil War," you could enter a sort date of 1863 as a median year on which to sort events and calculate ages. Reunion tries to help here by approximating a sort date: if your custom date is "1845 or 1847," Reunion will automatically enter the first year in the sort date box. You can edit the sort date anytime.

Other examples of custom dates:

- The Quaker date "2q 1845" -- for which Reunion will enter a sort date of "Feb 1845"
- A range of years like "1845-1847" or "1845-7" or "1845/7"
- A time period like "The Winter of '45" -- for which Reunion will enter the default century and the year as the sort date. (Set the default century using **Options -> Dates.**)

Those of you with Jewish family history can use Hebrew dates in Reunion. You can switch between the Hebrew and Gregorian or secular dates by using a simple addition to the date field. [**Help -> Search for Help, "Hebrew dates"**]

Date expressions are handy ways to enter dates using other dates as a reference. For instance, perhaps you do not know Eliza Mae STANTON's birth date. However, her tombstone inscription reads "Died 21 July 1848 Aged 21 years 4 months 3 days." After you enter Eliza Mae's death date as a reference, you can enter her birth date using the tombstone age as a date expression: type in "21 years 4 months 3 days before death." When you press the tab key, her birth date is calculated and appears in the birth date field: 18 Mar 1827.

Edit Person

Eliza Mae STANTON Person ID: 640

[Name](#) [Events](#) [Facts](#) [Notes](#) [Flags](#)

Type	Date	Place	Memo
Birth	21 yea 4 mon 3 day bef dea		
Death	21 Jul 1848	Nicholson Twp, Wyoming Co, PA	
Burial			

[Notice that I didn't have to type in the entire words in the date expression -- the first three letters are enough for Reunion.]

On the other hand, if you know Eliza Mae's birth date, but can't read her death date on the tombstone, you could enter her age in the death date field as a date expression: "21 years 4 months 3 days old." Press the tab key and her death date is calculated. Neat, huh?

There are all kinds of possible combinations to create valid dates using date expressions. If you know the birth date and age at marriage, you could approximate the year of marriage by using "22 years after birth." The date of reference used with these expressions can also be a constant, like "today" or "4 weeks ago yesterday." Reunion uses your Mac's system date to calculate in this case. Refer to the electronic manual for more on date expressions. My personal favorite is "9 months before birth." [**Help -> Search for Help, "date expressions"**]

[Articles Page](#) / [Reunion Home Page](#)

e-mail: info@LeisterPro.com

© 2000 Leister Productions, Inc. All rights reserved.

This article first appeared in the May/June 1998 issue of Everton's Genealogical Helper magazine.