

Family History Research Tips

- 1. Use Google Chrome browser with FamilySearch.org.**

Start with yourself in Family Tree. Connect yourself to a deceased person by adding living people as placeholders in Family Tree until you get to other person pages of ancestors who have already been added to the tree. This is called building a bridge between the living and the deceased. Don't forget to document yourself for your current or future descendants.
- 2. Check for duplicates and add sources to deceased persons and to each member of their family.** Use the "Research Helps/Hints," "Similar Records," "Unfinished Attachments," and "FamilySearch" links on each person's page to document what you know.
- 3. Include your personal knowledge/records that you have at home or can gather from relatives or friends of relatives.** Don't forget information on other computer programs/notes (PAF, RootsMagic, etc.).
- 4. Use the email or internal "Send a Message" feature in FamilySearch.org to connect with others who are working on the same lines as you are, even if it is not the same exact individual.**
- 5. Research one whole family at a time, not just an individual.** Capture every detail about who they were, where they lived, and who was in the family. Examine each record you find for every detail it has and make sure it is reflected on the person's page and is clearly explained. A research log may be helpful in addition to making notes to edit Person Pages later and to help figure out relationships.
- 6. Don't go the next generation back until you are sure of the one closest to you.** Have a solid link from you to the last person on Family Tree. However, when you are searching for documents on an individual, look for the most recently created records. They are usually easier to find and will give you something to start with to help look for other family members. For example, find the death record before the birth record since it may be easier to find and may be more complete.
- 7. Continue to expand your knowledge of the family by making notes on a "Family Chart."** (See another added file.) This will help you focus your research and remind you to look for other documents. Some details might spark an idea for a different conclusion when viewed chronologically on a chart or a timeline.

8. As you study each family, ask yourself questions about the details and events in their lives, such as:
 - Is it logical or reasonable that...?
 - Are the children listed with reasonable time spaces?
 - Could there be twins?
 - Is there a name that was used again for another child that died?
 - Is it a heritage name?
 - Why are no children listed for this couple or only one?
 - What other records or paper trail might I look for?
 - Who else might have known and recorded information about....?
 - What else can this information tell me, or where can it direct me besides the obvious?
 - Does this make sense timewise? Place-wise? Relationship-wise? What doesn't make sense? Why not?
 - Certificates or Tax Records – Is there a family relationship to the witness, or the recorder, or who performed the ceremony? Or paid the tax bill?
 - Photos of your ancestors – When were they born? Where did they live? Who else is in the photo? What is their relationship? Where was it taken? What was the event or time period?
9. Let the data and research prove or confirm your information. Let it prove the information you already have, or that has “always” been known, instead of the reverse.

Basic Records and the usual order of searching them.

1. U.S. Federal Census – In the USA every 10 years from 1790-1930; then check available state, county, local censuses.
2. Vital Records – lists, indexes and certificates of birth, marriage, and death; search these records chronologically.
3. Probate Records – wills, trusts, etc.
4. Land Records – deeds and taxes

Why Census Records?

Census information is usually readily available, fairly easy to access, and frequently reliable. The information provided there is very helpful and the “what’s missing” can help you ask different questions using common sense or logical deduction.

Repetition of information can add confidence and surety to your knowledge of family members and events, even though they are secondary sources given by one member of the family or even a neighbor.

Check name changes – nicknames or “Americanization”, ages, occupations, new relationships or others living with the family. Always look about 3 pages before and after the family to notice family friends that move to new places with the family or individuals that move-in with the family through the years as boarders or by marriage.

DON'T: assume correctness, completeness, or the spelling of names is accurate or that the wife is the mother of any or all children, or that records before 1850 can't help.

DO: pay attention to the information at the top of the census page, study the handwriting, watch for families on split pages, look for repeat neighbors (friends sometimes moved together), find your ancestors in every census taken during their lifetime, look for all the surnames of your ancestor in the same county, use maps as you search, consider and accommodate typos when using indexes, note real estate values and look for deeds or wills, look for maiden names.

Major differences in records of each census year:

1790-1840 – head of household by surname/given name, gender by age range brackets, ages by age range brackets, number of slaves in some states.

1850-1930 – Every person in household listed, age; starting in 1880 – relationship to the head of household and birthplaces of parents, property, occupation, homeowner/renter on later censuses

1900 additions – birth month and year of every person, number of children born and number living for each mother, number of years married, immigration/naturalization dates.

Additional Search Tips:

1. Adjust the Search Filters to find a balance between entering too much and not enough. 50-100 is a target range for search results to find several extended family members on a site. Fewer results are needed if you have several known

facts. Start with less information and then add more. Use the exact boxes selectively. Use the Collections Tab to find specific information you are missing on FamilySearch.org. Use the “Find Similar People” tab on the Person Page to help you find more relatives.

2. Provide a year range instead of an exact date. Broaden the location instead of starting with the city, county and state. This is not a fill in the blank exercise! Try just a marriage date, or just a death date or just the birth date with the residence. *Numerical ranges (age ranges, ranges of years to be searched, etc.) seem to cause matches to be missed more often than any other required element in searches.* If you don't find someone you think should be there, try taking numerical ranges out of your search requirements first.
3. Consider initials, nicknames, misspellings, phonetic spellings, and name changes, of both the people and the locations. Learn cultural and location naming patterns.
4. Try just the surname (birth and married for women) and a location. Use both couple's surnames and a year range in a location. Try different combinations of relatives. Look for the children of the parents by searching just for records of both parents together. Try the parents' names and the spouse's name only. Put in just a last name and then the geographic location to find all the people in that city or county or on a rare name in the state to see other possible family members.
5. Remember that middle and first names were often used inter-changeably and middle names of men were frequently the birth name of the mother.
6. Use different places and levels of jurisdictions for records. Example: Where were the records sent when the church was closed? OR, were county records also sent to the state? OR, was the location for records storage changed with geographic boundary changes?
7. Try different date ranges to determine if a record was recorded later. Especially births, christenings, wills and land records.
8. For very common names restrict collections to one record group with the location if you know it, for example, Utah 1860 U.S. Census. If you narrow quickly, then make a note of it and then search the surrounding locations (cities,

counties and states) and other record types to find additional branches of the family or where the family relocated. Reset the restrict filter to make sure you have cleared the previous ones. Refresh the page also.

9. Search for a close relative or a neighbor and track them to see how their lives crossed.
10. It can be helpful when trying to prove identity and your connection to a specific individual versus another by the same name to document each of them over a period of time with what you can find. Take time to prove that one of them is NOT your relative.
11. The 4 Giant Worldwide Sites are FamilySearch.org, Ancestry.com, FindMyPast.com, and MyHeritage.com. Each of these has spelling variation searches built into their search features, but still use name variations in multiple searches. Also use wildcards in FamilySearch.org. On other less sophisticated websites and also on Google, try some of the search ideas below:
 - a) Phrases in quotes.
 - b) Boolean operands (AND, OR, NOT) to include names and places.
 - c) In advanced search options use “with all the words, with the exact phrase, with at least one of the words, without the words,” etc.
 - d) Use your browser’s Find on Page feature to more easily search for occurrences of the town name in the narrowed county results if there are several hits. You can use Ctrl+F also to find names or places on a page with lots of search results.
 - e) Use ? to replace one character in a name or place. Use * to replace zero or more characters in a name or place. Use both in one word. Use more than one of each in a word also. For example: Wal*er finds Waler, Walter and Walker. Wal*e* also finds Walters and Walenbach. W?!*er also finds Wiler, Willer, Wyler, etc.
 - f) Try wild card searches to replace the vowels in the first three letters of the name. This is called an AEIOUY search. This type of search (example: man*, men*, min*, mon*, mun*, and myn*) is very good for finding not only occurrences of the surname Monday, but also Mande, Mandie, Mandy, Monde, Mondy, Munday, and Mundy.