

## Family History Research Tips

Use Google Chrome browser with FamilySearch.org. for smoother continuous research and memory operations.

### Sequences

1. 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 and resolve duplicates. Check "Find Similar People." You might find brother or sisters or aunts and uncles etc. also. It is located on the person's front page under the Tools section.
3. Use the "Research Helps/Hints," "Similar Records," "Unfinished Attachments," and "FamilySearch" links on each person's page to document what you know and new things you are learning.
4. 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.).
5. 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.
6. **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 shown on the front page of the person's pages and is clearly explained under "Other Information". A research log may be helpful in addition to making notes to edit Person Pages later and to help figure out relationships. When the computer searches for Record Hints it uses everything on the front page of the person's page.

7. Don't go the next generation back until you are sure of the ones 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. However, a death record may not be very accurate about a person's birth since the informant may not have known them very long.

8. Continue to expand your knowledge of the family by making notes on a "Family Chart." This will help you focus your research and remind you to look for other documents including military, land ownership, tax records etc.. and EVERY census. Some details might spark an idea for a different conclusion when viewed chronologically on a chart or a timeline.

9. As you study each family, ask yourself questions about the details and events in their lives, such as:

- Is it logical or reasonable that...? Children birth places?
- 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 time-wise? Place-wise? Relationship-wise? What doesn't make sense? Why not?
- What is the relationship of other people who are living with them?
- Certificates or Tax Records – Is there a family relationship to the witness, informant, 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?

**10.** 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. Family stories or legends are helpful but are often expanded or colored to match the personalities of the individuals.

### **Basic Records and the usual order of searching them**

1. U.S. Federal Census – In the USA every 10 years from 1790-1950; check also available state, county, local censuses.
2. Vital Records – lists, indexes and certificates of birth, marriage, and death as available.
3. Probate Records – wills, trusts, etc.
4. Land Records – deeds and taxes

### **Why Census Records?**

Census information is usually readily available and frequently reliable. The “what’s missing” can help you ask different questions using common sense or logical deduction.

Repetition of information can add confidence 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.

**DO:** pay attention to the information at the top of the census page to check for institutional facilities for clues, study the handwriting to make sure they have indexed it correctly, 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.

General 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 also number of children who are living for each mother, number of years married, immigration/naturalization dates.

### **Additional Search Tips:**

1. Adjust the Search Filters to start with less information and date ranges first, then add more specifics. Use the exact boxes selectively.
2. 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. Use the Collections Tab to find specific information you are missing on FamilySearch.org.
4. Consider initials, nicknames, misspellings, phonetic spellings, and name changes, of both the people and the locations. Learn cultural and location naming patterns.
5. 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.

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 just one at a time with the location if known. 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. Refresh the page and reset the restrict filter.
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.
12. Also use wildcards in FamilySearch.org.
13. On less sophisticated websites and also on Google try searching: Phrases in quotes, (AND, OR, NOT) to include or exclude names and places, in advanced search options use “with all the words, with the exact phrase, with at least one of the words, without the words,” etc.
14. 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.
15. Use wild card searches with a ? to replace one letter in a name or place. Use \* to replace zero or more letters in a name or place. Or use both in one word or more than one of each in a word. For example: Wal\*er finds Waler, Walter and Walker. Wal\*e\* also finds Walters and Walenbach. W?l\*er also finds Wiler, Willer, Wyler, etc.
16. Try wild card searches to replace the vowels in the first three letters of the name. This is called an AEIOUY search. (example: man\*, men\*,

min\*, mon\*, mun\*, and myn\*) This helps you find not only occurrences of the surname Monday, but also Mande, Mandie, Mandy, Monde, Mondy, Munday, and Mundy

### **Extra Tips for Finding Females**

- 1. Keep a surname list!!! And a hand written map or chart of relationships in front of you that you can easily add to as you find new information or possible information.**
2. Remember that middle and first names were often used interchangeably and middle names of men were frequently the birth last name of the mother.
3. Be sure you are searching with both the birth and married surnames as you learn them. For example, searching for marriages with the female's first married last name may give you an additional marriage for her or it may give you her husband's sister's marriage record.
4. Look for death records of the husband(s) or divorce records from the husband(s) to clarify a time line of her life.
5. Keep a list of first names (and their nick names) and surnames to say them out loud and listen for names that sound alike and may have been written phonetically.
6. Make notes of migration patterns of the family by using the births, marriages and deaths of immediate family members - funeral homes and cemeteries. Check obituaries for more relatives and make note that pall bearers could be her brothers, her uncles, or nephews etc.
7. Check military records of their husbands for pension records. You may find letters or notes from family members verifying their marriage. [fold3.com](http://fold3.com) and NARA at [archives.gov/research/military](http://archives.gov/research/military).
8. County histories, City directories, voting records, tax records (especially for more personal items like a piano or an inheritance), and school records, wills and estate records and land and deed records.
9. Newspaper announcements may tell about their friends that can provide clues to more information since often more than one family member will marry close neighbors.
10. Family Records like oral histories, midwives journals, letters, diaries, quilts, samplers, cookbooks, photos, scrap books, family bibles and manuscripts in local archives and historical and genealogy societies or women's clubs or lineage societies.