

Back Door and Rear Window Research Strategies

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1. Trace siblings or other relatives to track down your own family.

- ❖ Probate records of relatives often mentioned people and their relationship to the decedent. (Check all probate records in the docket, not just the will. Even when there is no will there may be documents that frequently mention heirs, their relationship and their addresses.)

Example: A friend needed to prove that her grandfather was the son of a particular man so she could get her DAR application approved. Unfortunately, he didn't appear in any records with his father; however his father did appear in a census with a daughter. Probate records of the daughter mentioned her brother by name and relationship and so the link was proven.

- ❖ There may be a birth, death, marriage or christening record available for a sibling that will give parent's names including the maiden name of the mother.

Example: On the 1900 census Jessie Stewart appears with her family, but her mother's maiden name was unknown. No birth record for her existed in that county or any of the counties nearby. However a birth record was found for her younger brother who also appeared on the 1900 census which listed the mother's maiden name.

- ❖ Local histories, especially those written in earlier years, and old obituaries may contain mention of family members.

Example: Martin came over from Germany at a young age with his parents, but we could not find reference to where in Germany he was born or what his mother's maiden name was. Excerpts from a lengthy and detailed obituary for Martin's brother, William, filled many voids in his history. ... *"William Frederick Sette, son of Martin Federick Sette and his wife Carolyn, nee Meyer, was born at Zorndorf, Province of Brandenburg, Germany, March 17, 1852, and at the age of three years came to America with his parents when they settled on what is known as the Sette homestead in the Town of Clyman in the year 1855.... Following their marriage in 1876, Mr. and Mrs. W.F. Sette lived for many years on the Clyman homestead, where Mr. Sette's father Martin, died in April 1894, and his mother, Carolyn, followed in death in May 1911.... Mr. Sette also took over the interests of his brother Martin in the Juneau Telephone Company and was an officer of that corporation until the rural communications line was later sold to the Wisconsin Telephone Company."*

- ❖ People tended to immigrate and migrate with family and friends. If you lose a relative or cannot find their place of origin try checking in areas where other relatives or former neighbors have moved to or from. Some good articles and websites on American migration patterns:

<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~gentutor/migration.html>

<http://www.cyndislist.com/migration.htm>

<http://books.google.com/books?id=rtRFyFO4hpEC&pg=PA246&lpg=PA246&dq=pioneer+settlement+patterns+in+the+united+states&source=web&ots=IhxUwiAEYt&sig=-HSrPe-iKMNLfcmvrMqenzB4pXk&hl=en#PPP1,M1>

- ❖ Searching for children in a family can often locate the family in the census or other records when searching for the parents failed.

2. ***Use alternate spellings for names and places. Be aware of the frequent use of nicknames.***

- ❖ Soundex Converter websites can help to give many possibilities of alternate spellings for names. The first one in the list below is especially helpful. Be careful as some similar sounding names that are used interchangeably such as Rogers, Roggers and Rodgers and Jerrold and Gerald have different Soundex codes.

Example: George W. Gerald's surname was listed as Jerrold in the 1860 census, Gerald in the 1870 census, Gerold in the 1880 census, and Giraldo in the 1900 census.

Example: For many years Betty searched for her great grandfather, Noah Rogers but was unable to find him in the census, even when using the Soundex option in the search field. Once the spelling was changed to Rodgers, she found him and she was able to go back ten generations with the information that she found.

Some online Soundex converters are:

<http://resources.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/soundexconverter>

<http://searches.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/Genea/soundex.sh>

<http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Hills/3916/soundex.html>

- ❖ Less is more... use the first three letters in a name for online index searches. You will get all the Embrey, Embry, Embree, Embrie, Embriegh, Embury, Embery entries by typing in "Emb" then using a wild card symbol such as *. If you are looking for a name such as Johnson but don't know whether it is spelled with an o or an e you could type in Johns*n and get all of them. Not all search engines use the * as a wild card so check to see which wild card symbol they use.

- ❖ First name searches can be really effective if you are unable to locate the person by their surname.

Example: We searched in the 1860 census for Tabitha Haines, born about 1825 in MS, who was living with her daughter, Barbara, born about 1850 in MS in the Lincoln, LA 1880 census. We used Tab*, born 1825 +/- 5 years in MS and got 9 hits, none of them with the surname Haines. The 5th hit was the right one with Tabitha Cathe, born 1825 in MS, and her daughter, Barbara Cathe, born about 1850 in MS currently living in Yazoo, MS.

- ❖ Finding people listed only by their initials can be challenging. If you have checked the index and not found them listed, try doing just a surname search in the specific area you are searching, then checking every entry.
- ❖ Get familiar with nicknames associated with more formal names.
https://wiki.familysearch.org/en/Traditional_Nicknames_in_Old_Documents_-_A_Wiki_List
- ❖ If you find in a record that a person was born in a particular place but you can't find it, the place name may have been misspelled. You can Google the name and very often Google will say "Did you mean...." And the correct spelling will appear. You could also go to the Family History Library Catalog, enter the larger jurisdiction you are looking for, click on "View Related Places" and scroll down until you find the sought after place.

Example: A record said that John died in Stillacum, Pierce County, Washington but no such place is found on a map of Pierce County. Googling it produced "Did you mean Steilacoom, WA?" and in the Library Catalog, scrolling down the towns in Pierce County also produces "Steilacoom".

- ❖ Be aware of local pronunciation of place names.

Example: My Nana always said her mother was born in Windham, Norfolk, England. Look though I might, there was no such place. One day, whilst talking to a cousin she also said her great aunt was born in Windham. I told her I couldn't find the place and asked her to show me on a map. The parish was spelled "Wymondham" but was pronounced "Windham".

3. *Disprove possible candidates.*

If you have more than one person with the same name in the same time period and the same place and you can't determine from the information you have who is the correct one, use as many sources as you can to eliminate one or more of the candidates.

Example: I have 5 William Brooks' in one generation on my pedigree. During this time period there are 4 William Brooks' in the census records, multiple land transactions involving William Brooks (grantor, grantee and witness), 7 marriages of William Brooks, and numerous probate records mentioning William Brooks either as a witness, devisor or devisee. There are also several William Brooks' mentioned in the tax records.

- Land records were painstakingly checked and platted.
- Tax records were scrutinized carefully and assigned to different men on the basis of the district they lived in.
- Those who appeared on the 1850 census and later had their ages and approximate years of birth as references for earlier censuses which were analyzed thoroughly.
- Probate records were pored over and every detail meticulously noted.
- Signatures and hand writing were compared and matched when possible.
- Marriage bonds and death records of every member of each family were noted and compared.

4. Use alternate records such as land, tax, military, court, directories and newspapers.

Example: We searched for years for a marriage of Independence Houck and his wife, Matilda to no avail. We could not determine her maiden name, even though we got the marriage and death records of all of her children. When searching in the Chancery Court records for the state of Maryland we came across this document several pages long of which we show only excerpts:

“Filed on the 17th of November 1829 against Temperance Lee, Joshua Lee, John Lee, William Lee, Caleb Lee, Jesse Lee, William Byrum and Clarissa his wife, Independence Houck and Matilda his wife, John Wilson and Penelope his wife, Jacob Faner and Mary his wife, Eleanor Lee and Ushley Lee..... Robert Lee was indebted to Thomas Worthington (deceased) for some land. Marcella Worthington, his widow, applied to Robert for payment in the September term 1822 with a result of \$64 being applied to what was owed. Since that time Robert Lee has died and Marcella Worthington is now suing his heirs for the balance owing. The defendant (Robert Lee) leaves Temperance, his widow, Thomas, Joshua, John, William, Caleb, Jesse, Clarissa, Matilda, Penelope, and Mary, his children and Eleanor and Ushley the children of his son, Robert Lee, Jr (deceased).” From these excerpts we find out:

- Robert Sr. died between Sept. 1822 and Nov. 1829.
- His wife was named Temperance.
- He had 11 children and we know the husbands of all of his daughters.
- His son, Robert, died before Nov 1829 and had 2 children, Eleanor and Ushley.
- Matilda’s maiden name is Lee.

Example: We searched for the name of Abraham Ackerson’s father for many years. We knew his mother’s name was Elizabeth and he had a brother, Thomas, as they all lived at the same address in Manhattan (37 Watts) per several years of city directories in the 1830’s. His father’s name did not appear on any of Abraham’s records nor Thomas’s. Going further back in the directories we found in 1829 that Elizabeth at 37 Watts was listed as the widow of John T. Ackerson.

Example: Sarah Elizabeth Ackerson was born in New York City and died in New Jersey. Her husband, Robert Cleary Hanks, was also born in New York and died in New Jersey. All of their children were born in either New York or New Jersey. They both appear in all of the censuses in either New York or New Jersey, yet we could not find their marriage in any county or city of New York or New Jersey. While going through some old Utah newspapers looking for Sarah’s brother, Alfred, we came across the following: *“A. H. Ackerson was a visitor to Salt Lake City last week. He went to meet his sister and aunt who arrived from New York. Mr. Ackerson was present at the marriage of his sister to R.C. Hanks. He arrived home on Friday.”* Sure enough, we found the marriage record in Salt Lake County!