

Strategies and Tools for Breaking through Genealogy Brick Walls

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The four ancestral identifiers in Genealogy are: Name, Date, Place and Relationship. If a search has come to a standstill it is often because something is wrong with one or more of the identifiers we are using. This class will take a closer look at each of the four identifiers and point out new ways of looking at information that may help researchers leap over or punch through brick walls.

1. NAMES:

- A. Sources of Surnames – Patronymics, Place of Abode, Occupation, Description
- B. Phonetic Variations – spelling and pronunciation challenges
- C. Accent & Language Issues – Consider the ancestral language.
- D. Translated Names – Did the anglicize name by simply translating it?
- E. Anglicized Surnames – Did they shorten or simplify a name?
- F. Misunderstanding “Foreign” Names - Is the name a multiple part surname?
- G. Nicknames – Many went by nicknames or diminutive names.
- H. Old Records – Names in Latin
- I. Indexing Issues -
 - ❖ Alphabet – not same in all languages
 - ❖ Diacritical Marks – Not just for decoration.
 - ❖ Locate a basic language guide for the language of your ancestors.
- J. Electronic Searching – Pluses and Minuses
 - ❖ Wild Cards
 - ❖ Typos
- K. Name Change
- L. Old World Naming Styles
 - ❖ Ethnic Naming Patterns
 - ❖ Other Customs
- M. Consider all possible forms of the name when searching.
 - ❖ Initials
 - ❖ Abbreviations: Chaz, Jas, Jno.
 - ❖ Occupational & Inherited Titles

Behind the Name <http://www.behindthename.com/> Shows name in various languages.

Behind the Surname <http://surnames.behindthename.com/>

Alternate Forms for the name John

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alternate_forms_for_the_name_John

Spelling Doesn't Count http://www.genealogy.com/articles/research/62_donna.html

Genealogy: Names: What's In A Name? <http://guides.lib.udel.edu/c.php?g=85348&p=549167>

FS Wiki Traditional Nicknames in Old Documents

https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Traditional_Nicknames_in_Old_Documents_-_A_Wiki_List

Video: Name Issues in Genealogy

https://mediaspace.illinois.edu/media/Name+Issues+in+GenealogyA+Problems+and+Opportunities/1_lwrln1ve/28379181

2. PLACE: Many of the things that happen to personal names can happen to place names.

A. Spelling vs. Pronunciation

- ❖ Learn about the Language & Pronunciation of the area in question.
- ❖ Talk to someone from that area about the possibilities.

B. Common Name Confusion

- ❖ Many places by the same name.
- ❖ If you are not finding your family – consider the possibilities

C. Places Have Nicknames

D. “Near Berlin Syndrome”

- ❖ Rather than give birthplace – ancestor says he lived “near” a much larger more famous place.
- ❖ What clues can help you pinpoint the location?

E. Incorrect Jurisdictions

- ❖ See The Handy Book for Genealogists, Everton Press, or Ancestry's Red Book for help with county. Available at most Libraries and FHCs..
- ❖ The Map Guide to the U.S. Federal Census, William Thorndale and William Dollarhide.

F. Obscure or Obsolete Place Name

- ❖ Historical Maps
- ❖ Historical Gazetteers

G. Mistaken Geography

- ❖ Faulty Recording

- ❖ Mistaken Geography by Previous Genealogist
- ❖ Mistake Informant

Map of US <http://www.mapofus.org/>

Internet Archive <https://archive.org/> Locate Historical Gazetteers that can be downloaded free.

Atlas of Historical County Boundaries <http://publications.newberry.org/ahcbp/>

Yale Peabody GNIS [Geographical Names Information System]

<http://sprout018.sprout.yale.edu/cgi-bin/GNIS>

US Historical Maps: Perry-Castañeda Collection <https://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/>

FS Wiki - U.S. Maps https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Maps#County_Boundary_Maps

3. DATES & AGES

A. The Human Factor

- ❖ Information Given From Memory
- ❖ Deception
- ❖ Mistaken Informant
- ❖ Copy Errors & Typos

B. Examine a Wider Time Frame

C. Calendars & Calendar Changes

Old Style and New Style Dates https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Style_and_New_Style_dates

Old Calendar and Dating Information <http://www.usgenweb.org/research/calendar.shtml>

Do the Math: Look for Dates that Don't Add Up <http://genealogysstar.blogspot.com/2013/02/do-math-look-for-dates-that-dont-add-up.html>

MyHeritage blog Understanding Dates: Five Common Mistakes to Avoid

<http://blog.myheritage.com/2015/01/understanding-dates-five-common-mistakes-to-avoid/>

Dates: Recording and Interpreting

http://www.dallasgenealogy.org/DGS_Docs/Hatcher/0506_Recording_and_Interpreting_Dates.pdf

4. RELATIONSHIPS: Make No Assumptions!

A. Insufficient Effort to Determine True Relationships

- ❖ Children = Adopted, Foster, Step, In-Law, Ward?
- ❖ Family vs. Hired help, servants, ?

B. Terminology – May Mean Something Different Depending on the Time-Frame, Location

- ❖ In-Law
- ❖ Cousin
- ❖ Nephew
- ❖ Infant
- ❖ Orphan
- ❖ Mrs.

C. More Colonial Customs – Multiple men with the same name.

Confusing Situations Word definitions and Surnames (National Institute)

[https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Confusing_Situations_Word_Definitions_and_Surnames_\(National_Institute\)](https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Confusing_Situations_Word_Definitions_and_Surnames_(National_Institute))

Encyclopedia of Genealogy: Relationships <http://www.eogen.com/Relationships>

Kinship Terminology: How we refer to our family relationships.

<https://blog.findmypast.co.uk/kinship-terminology-how-we-refer-to-our-family-relationships-1406061947.html>

GENERAL BRICK WALL HELP:

Do Not Assume: <http://genealogy.about.com/od/basics/a/assumptions.htm>

Why U Can't Find Your Ancestors <http://rwguide.rootsweb.ancestry.com/lesson8.htm>

7 Reasons You Can't Find Your Ancestors Online <http://genealogists.com/blog/2015/08/7-reasons-why-you-cant-find-your-ancestors-online/>

Genealogy: Recording Names and Places <http://www.familyeducation.com/life/history-names/genealogy-recording-names-and-places>

Solving Tough Research Problems—Overcoming Brick Walls

https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Solving_Tough_Research_Problems%E2%80%94Overcoming_Brick_Walls

Google “Family Tree Magazine Big Breakthroughs: Overcoming Genealogy Brick Walls” or go to www.familytreemagazine.com/ArticlePrint/big-breakthroughs

