

# Building Your Genealogical Skills

## Session 2: Researching

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### Glossary

- Genealogical information: Names, dates, places associated with birth, marriage, and death facts; also relationships or kinship
- Records: Contain one or more pieces of genealogical information
- Repository: Places where multiple sources are stored
- Sources: Contain multiple records
- Ahnentafel: German for ancestor table. A genealogical numbering system that begins with a person and works backwards
- Register or modified (NGSQ) numbering: Begins with an ancestor and works forward. The difference between Register and NGSQ is whether numbers are assigned only to people with additional information (Register) or whether every descendent receives a number (NGSQ).

### How to Research: Overview

**NB: Searching ≠ Researching**

#### General Principles

Try to consult multiple sources. Don't stop at the first answer that fits your question. You are going to want to gather as many records about a family or individual that you can find so that you can truly identify the uniqueness of your particular ancestor. And TRACK YOUR WORK.

#### Research Plan

A research plan helps you think systematically about your research. It includes the following components:

1. Goal: What do you want to know?
2. Known Facts: What do you already know about the subject of your research and the specific research question?
3. Working Hypothesis: What do you think the answer is? OR What is the time period and location that has the answer?
4. Sources: Which records might hold the answer? Do those records exist for my location?
5. Search Strategy: Which repositories have the sources and in what order should I search?



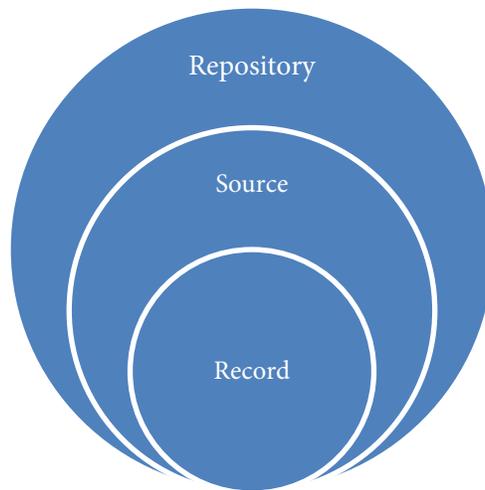
## Research Log

Research logs are underutilized by most genealogists. However, it is an invaluable habit to form and maintain. Research logs help prevent needless rework. At a minimum a log should include the name of the person or place that is being researched, the date of the search, the sources searched, and the search objective. You also need to include a space for results. Be sure to capture negative searches so that you don't research that source again.

## Where to Research: Repositories

### Repositories, Records and Sources

Beginning genealogists sometimes get confused about the difference between records, sources and repositories. A repository is a place where multiple sources are stored. A source contains multiple records and records contain one or more pieces of genealogical information. Think of nesting dolls or concentric circles.



Perhaps the most valuable repository is your own house and the houses of your family. Other brick and mortar repositories include:

- Federal and State Archives
- Town or City Halls
- Local Historical Societies
- Public or Private Libraries
- College or University Archives
- Lineage Societies
- Genealogical Societies
- Regional Museums

The major online repositories include [AmericanAncestors.org](http://AmericanAncestors.org) (NEHGS), [FamilySearch.org](http://FamilySearch.org), [Ancestry.com](http://Ancestry.com), and [Fold3.com](http://Fold3.com). Warning! Not Everything is Online!

## Online Repositories

To get the most out of an online repository, be sure to read the database descriptions. What are the places and time periods covered? Make liberal use of the site's catalog. Consult the research wikis or help files. The FamilySearch wikis are one of the best tools to help you understand what is available for a time and place.

In terms of searching, "Less is More." Don't be too specific when starting a search; you can always filter your search as you go on. When you find something, look at the records before and after your target. Seek the original; don't trust the transcription (or indexing)

## How to Research: Finding Aids

Don't be timid about using Finding Aids

### Finding Aids

1. Rhonda R. McClure, *Genealogist's Handbook for New England Research* (Boston : New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2021.)
2. The New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, *New York family history research guide and gazetteer* (New York, NY : New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, 2015).
3. Alice Eichholz, *Red book : American state, county, and town sources* (Provo, Utah : Ancestry, 2004.) - see also  
[https://wiki.rootsweb.com/wiki/index.php/Red\\_Book:\\_American\\_State,\\_County,\\_and\\_Town\\_Sources](https://wiki.rootsweb.com/wiki/index.php/Red_Book:_American_State,_County,_and_Town_Sources)
4. Loretto Dennis Szucs and Sandra Hargreaves Luebking, *The source : a guidebook to American genealogy* (Provo, UT : Ancestry, 2006.) see also  
[https://wiki.rootsweb.com/wiki/index.php/The\\_Source:\\_A\\_Guidebook\\_to\\_American\\_Genealogy](https://wiki.rootsweb.com/wiki/index.php/The_Source:_A_Guidebook_to_American_Genealogy)
5. Town and County Histories – check online. Many of these were published prior to 1920 and thus are digitally available online.
6. American Ancestors Research Guides. Includes subject specific guides as well as guides about New England towns. <https://www.americanancestors.org/tools/research-guides> .
7. Portable Genealogists – American Ancestors

### 17<sup>th</sup> Century Finding Aids

1. Clarence Almon Torrey, *New England marriages prior to 1700* (Boston, Massachusetts : New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2011)
2. Meredith Colket, *Founders of early American families : immigrants from Europe, 1607-1657* (Cleveland, Ohio : General Court of the Order of Founders and Patriots of America, 2002.)
3. Hollick, Martin E. (Martin Edward), 1963-
4. Martin E. Hollick, *New Englanders in the 1600s : a guide to genealogical research published between 1980 and 2005* (Boston, Mass. : New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2006.)
5. Robert Charles Anderson, *Great Migration Directory, 1620-1640* (Boston, MA: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2015).

## Miscellaneous Finding Aids

1. City Directories
2. Maps
3. Newspapers
4. Diaries
5. Journals (private and published)
6. Adoption records
7. Organization records
8. Lineage society records
9. Fraternal organization records
10. Employment records
11. Social Security
12. Bank records
13. Insurance records
14. Driving records
15. Phone books
16. Yearbooks

## Organizing All That Stuff

See Rhonda R. McClure, "Getting Organized," Subject Guide at American Ancestors.

<https://www.americanancestors.org/education/learning-resources/read/getting-organized>

Rule number 1 for organization is to use a system you can maintain – there is no one "right" way to organize – everyone's brain is different. Consistency is the key and is leaving a paper trail. Using standard forms simplifies your task.

Think of organizing as four different types of tasks:

- Organizing your research process
- Organizing your findings
- Organizing your files
- Organizing your summary

## Organizing the Research Process

Use the Tools/Forms!

- Research plan
- Research log

Use a paper or digital notebook to keep track of questions that arise. Use to-do lists to help you remember what you wanted to do with the piece of information you just found.

Some genealogists find a note-taking software to be helpful:

- Evernote
- OneNote

## Organizing Your Findings

The key tools include:

- Pedigree chart
- Family Group Sheet

## Organizing Your Files

Software is a tool – not a crutch! Beware the temptation to let the software do your thinking for you!

### Organizing Digital Materials

#### File Naming

The naming system for your files should be easy to remember. For electronic files, a simple mnemonic may work well: who, what, where, when. Start with the name of the person, surname first, followed by the given name, e.g. Hummer-Jacob or HummerJacob for fewer keystrokes. Sometimes you will add a birth year to distinguish people of the same name.

Next, add a short descriptor for the type of document, e.g., will, land, census, church. Keep a list of the descriptors you use so you don't inadvertently add new ones when you don't need to. Third, add a location for the record, followed by a year. For Jacob Hummer's will the file name would be: HummerJacob-will-FrederickMD-1777.

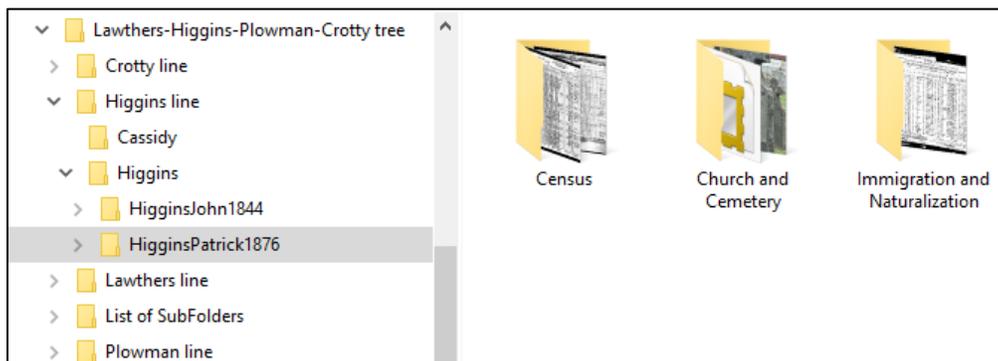
Table 1: Sample File Names

HummerJacob-deed-EmmitsburgMD-1810
LawthersNancy-gravemarker-GreenvillePA-2022
HomerFred-Will-p1-Cleveland-1903
HigginsJohn1844-death-ModorraHIRE-1925
CrottyJames-census-EastchesterNY-1900

#### Folder Structure

Files reside in folders. Your folder naming system is also important. Typically, you will organize your folders into surname groups. At the top level you will have a folder with a name such as "Genealogy Files" or perhaps the name of your family tree. Under that your folders may be the four major surnames for your family, e.g., Lawthers, Plowman, Higgins, Crotty. Within each major branch there will be a surname folder for the surnames you have researched.

Table 2: Sample Folder Structure



The next level will be folders with types of records. The folder “list of subfolders” contains a master list of empty folders by record type, e.g. vital records, military, etc. In the example above, Patrick Higgins, born 1876 has census, cemetery, and immigration records. Record type folders may include:

- Vitals
- Census
- Church and Cemetery
- Immigration and  
Citizenship
- Military
- Land
- Probate
- Newspaper

### Hard Copy Naming System:

Hard copy documents are often filed in folders by couple. A child’s record typically resides in the parents’ folder until the children marries or establishes their own household. Records from this point forward are filed in the child’s household folder.

## Organizing Your Summary

### Genealogical Sketch

The genealogical sketch is a compact way of summarizing your findings in a way that makes it easy to pass the information to your family and others. A sketch typically covers one person and their spouse and has three parts: beginning, middle and end. The beginning includes all the vital information about a couple in the following order:

- Place of birth/baptism and birth/baptism date(s)
- Place of death/burial and death/burial date(s)
- Place of marriage and marriage date

The middle portion of a genealogical sketch is whatever biographical information you wish to include. The ending section lists the couple’s children and their dates.

People are numbered

### Genealogical Numbering Systems

There are three principal numbering systems used in genealogical works. Most compiled genealogies use one of these three systems: Ahnentafel, Register or NGSQ.

#### Ahnentafel

The Ahnentafel, or ancestor table, system works backwards from the present. The multi-generational chart or pedigree embodies this system

Figure 1: Ahnentafel Numbering System<sup>1</sup>

12. **LEMUEL ASHLEY DECATUR PAYNE** was born in North Carolina 29 January 1844 and died at Austin, Travis County, Texas 21 September 1911. He married ca. 1869,<sup>20</sup>
13. **NANCY DIALTHA BLANTON**, who was born in Monroe County, Tennessee 29 December 1846 and died at Austin 5 May 1913.<sup>21</sup>
14. **JAMES CRAWFORD McMILLAN** was born in Missouri 12 February 1828 and died in Karnes County, Texas 31 August 1907. He married in Hill County, Texas 24 November 1864,<sup>22</sup>
15. **AGNES INCE**, who was born in Missouri in 1845 and died at Arlington, Tarrant County, Texas before 23 November 1916.<sup>23</sup>

## Register System

The Register numbering system descends from an ancestor and assigns numbers to individuals who have separate biographical sketches

Figure 2: Register Numbering System

### Genealogical Summary

**1. HENRY<sup>1</sup> DISPAW/DESPER** was born say 1618 (assuming marriage at 25), and died in Lynn, Massachusetts, in October 1676.<sup>[10]</sup> He married in Horsemonden, Kent, 10 April 1643, **HELEN JARRET**, who died probably prior to 1673 when her husband and son Henry, both potters, immigrated to Massachusetts.

Henry Dispaw left a will dated 27 February 1674[/5?], proved 26 June 1677, mentioning sons Henry and Edward. The other children, whose baptisms are shown below, evidently died or remained in England.

Children of Henry<sup>1</sup> and Helen (Jarret) Dispaw/Desper, all baptisms in Horsemonden:

2. i. **HENRY<sup>2</sup> DISPAW**, b. ca. 1644; m. (1) \_\_\_\_\_; (2) **CATHERINE** \_\_\_\_\_.
- ii. **JOAN DISPAW**, bp. 13 Sept. 1646.
3. iii. **EDWARD DISPAW**, bp. 24 March 1649/50; m. **SARAH** \_\_\_\_\_.
- iv. **CHRISTOPHER DISPAW**, bp. 7 Feb. 1654.
- v. **WILLIAM DISPAW**, bp. 27 March 1657.

<sup>1</sup> Rhonda R. McClure, *Ancestors of Bob Schieffer* (Boston: NEHGS, 2016).

## National Genealogical Society Quarterly Numbering System

The NGSQ numbering system is also a descending numbering system. It differs from the Register system in that all individuals are numbered. People with separate sketches are indicated with a plus sign.

Figure 3: National Genealogical Society Quarterly Number Systems

THIRD GENERATION

4. Theunis<sup>3</sup> De Clark, son of Jacobus<sup>2</sup> DeClark (2), born May 20, 1708 at Tappan, christened there June 23, 1708.  
Married Nov. 4, 1732 in New York City, Catherine Nax (Nack), dau. of Matthew Nax and Angenetje Schaats.  
Children of Theunis<sup>3</sup> De Clark and Catherine Nax (christened at Tappan).  
+12. Jacobus,<sup>4</sup> born Oct. 20, 1733, chr. Oct. 21, 1733. Md. Jannetje Springstein.  
13. Angenetje,<sup>4</sup> born June 13, 1735, chr. July 13, 1735.  
14. Matthys,<sup>4</sup> born Sept. 30, 1737, chr. Oct. 23, 1737. Died young.  
15. Matthys,<sup>4</sup> born Oct. 24, 1739, chr. Dec. 2, 1739.

## Resources for Organizing

Rhonda R. McClure, "Getting Organized," Subject Guide at American Ancestors.

<https://www.americanancestors.org/tools/getting-organized>

Penelope L. Stratton and Henry B. Hoff, *Guide to Genealogical Writing* (Boston: NEHGS, 2014).

Joan Curran, Madilyn Crane and John H. Wray, *Numbering Your Genealogy* (Arlington, VA: National Genealogical Society, 2008).