

Breaking Down Brick Walls: Strategies for Success

Taking Action: How to Create a Research Plan

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Use the F.A.N.:

1. Family Members-
 - a. Those with the same surname
 - b. Others too: in-laws, cousins, grandparents, great-grandparents, and step-siblings
2. Associates-
 - a. Persons: politics, religion, education, and occupation
 - b. Places: place of birth or death
3. Neighbors-
 - a. Persons who share the same address
 - b. Persons from the same neighborhood, town, or county
 - c. Same cemetery plot or neighboring church pews

Step #1- Get Organized

Use a research log, annotated research log, five generation chart, genealogical software, or family group sheet to record data. Blank templates can be found at American Ancestors- <http://www.americanancestors.org/education/learning-resources/download>

Standards of recording data:

- Names
 - Write surnames in all CAPITAL LETTERS
 - Record a woman using her maiden name
 - When a maiden name is unknown use MNU/--?--/_____
- Dates
 - Record dates as DAY-MONTH-YEAR (example: 16 January 2016)
 - **DO NOT** use slash marks or two digit years (example: 1/16/2016 or 1/16/2016)
- Places
 - Note smallest to largest geographic division (example: Boston, Suffolk County, Massachusetts)
 - For outside the U.S.: townland/parish, county, country
 - Be sure to identify counties
 - **DO NOT** use postal abbreviations (example: Massachusetts, **DO NOT USE** MA or Mass)

Step #2- Define your objective

Once you have organized your information, you must then determine what information is lacking.

- Are you missing dates or locations? How about missing names? Are parents missing? Maiden names?
- Next, determine what individuals or families intrigue you the most? It is best to tackle one line at a time.
- Create a list of questions or objectives to research.

Step #3- List Records that will aid in your research

List records that will aid in your research-

- Census (Federal and State)
- Vital Records (Birth, Marriage, Death)
- Church Records
- Land Records (Federal, State, County)
- Court Records (Probate, Civil, Criminal)
- Newspapers (obits, wedding notices)
- Naturalization records or Passenger Lists
- City Directories

A helpful chart identifying these records be found at American Ancestors-

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

Find resources in repositories and online-

- Check both the online and physical holdings
- Contact historical societies, lineage societies, local libraries, genealogical societies, colleges and university archives, federal and state archives, town halls, etc....
- Always think outside the box!

Map out your plan of action: Use a Research Log or Annotated Research Log to keep an organized list of the resources that you checked

https://media.americanancestors.org/uploadedfiles/content/education/learning_resources/downloads/research-log.pdf

Step #4- Find the Resources

Educate yourself-

- Digitized Books:
 - <https://www.hathitrust.org/>
 - <https://books.google.com/>
 - <https://archive.org/index.php>
 - <https://openlibrary.org/>
 - <https://books.familysearch.org>
 - <http://library.si.edu/digital-library>
- Guide books:
 - Rhonda R. McClure, ed., *Genealogist's Handbook for New England Research*, 6th ed. (Boston: NEHGS, 2021)
 - *Red Book: American State, County, and Town Sources*, 3rd ed. (Ancestry Publishing, 2004)

- *The Source: A Guidebook to American Genealogy*, 3rd ed. (Ancestry Publishing, 2006)
- *New York Family History Research Guide and Gazetteer*, 1st ed. (New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, 2015)
- Portable Genealogists
 - Immigration to the U.S.
 - U.S. Naturalization
 - NY State Census
 - MA State Census
 - Using the Federal Census: 1790-1840
 - Using the Federal Census: 1850-1950
 - Organizing your Research
 - Problem Solving in Irish Research
 - 17th Century New England Research
 - Using DNA in Genealogy
 - African American Resources
 - Applying to Lineage Societies
 - Building a Genealogical Sketch
 - Genealogical Numbering
 - Editorial Stylesheet
 - Reference Notes
 - Indexing
- Research Guides: <https://www.americanancestors.org/tools/research-guides>
- Family Search Wiki: https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Main_Page
- NEHGS webinars
 - Upcoming- <http://www.americanancestors.org/Education/Online-Classes/>
 - Archived- <https://www.americanancestors.org/video-library>

Step #5- Research

Perform the research as defined in your plan. Remember, the research plan is fluid, not absolute.

- Be patient and open to alternative record groups and/or people of interest
- Return to your original research plan to locate any holes or missed opportunities
- Expand beyond the initial F.A.N.
 - Family of Associates and Neighbors
 - Associates of Family and Neighbors
 - Neighbors
- Rethink your column headings
 - Language spoken at home
 - Occupation
 - Witnesses/Sponsors
 - Naturalization status
 - Veteran

Most Commonly Used Records

Censuses:

- **United States**- 1790, 1800, 1810, 1820, 1830, 1840, 1850, 1860, 18570, 1880, 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930, 1940, and 1950 (1890 U.S. Federal Census missing due to fire)
 - www.ancestry.com
 - www.familysearch.org



- www.americanancestors.org
- **Canada-** 1825, 1831, 1842, 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891, 1901, 1906, 1911, 1916, and 1921
 - www.ancestry.com
 - www.familysearch.org
 - NEHGS microfilm
- **UK-** 1841, 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891, 1901, 1911, 1921
 - www.ancestry.com
 - www.familysearch.org
 - www.findmypast.com
- **Scotland-** 1841, 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891, 1901, 1911
 - www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk
- **Ireland-** 1901 and 1911
 - <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/>

Vital Records:

Modern vital records are often kept on the local level (either state, county, or town) while older records may have been moved to an archives, library, or local historical society. The location, availability, and accessibility of vital records vary from state to state.

- To locate available vital records in New England, consult *Genealogist's Handbook for New England Research*, 6th ed. (NEHGS, 2021).
- For vital records outside of New England, refer to *Red Book: American State, County, and Town Sources*, 3rd ed. (Ancestry Publishing, 2004) or *The Source: A Guidebook to American Genealogy*, 3rd ed. (Ancestry Publishing, 2006)

Bible Records:

- <https://researchworks.oclc.org/archivegrid/>
- www.americanancestors.org
- http://services.dar.org/Public/DAR_Research/search/?Tab_ID=12

Cemetery Records:

In addition to transcribed cemetery records that may be found in local libraries or as manuscripts in a local historical society or genealogical society (such as NEHGS), you may find an online database. These are the most popular (some larger cemeteries have their own databases):

- www.findagrave.com
- www.billiongraves.com
- www.interment.net

Church Records:

Once you identify your ancestor's religion, search in church records for their baptism, marriage, confirmation, or burial. Dismissals and Membership may also be included in the records of the church.

- Church archives
 - www.congregationallibrary.org (Congregational Church)
 - www.gcah.org (Methodist Church Archives)
 - <http://www.bostoncatholic.org/Offices-And-Services/Office-Detail.aspx?id=12294&pid=1484> (Catholic Church- Boston)
- NEHGS library
- AmericanAncestors.org
- familysearch.org

Finding Aids:

Anderson, Robert Charles, *The Great Migration Begins: Immigrants to New England, 1620-1633* (3 vols., Boston: NEHGS, 1995); *The Great Migration: Immigrants to New England 1634-1635* (7 vols. to date; Boston, NEHGS, 1999-2011); *The Great Migration Directory* (Boston: NEHGS, 2015). These volumes include sketches of all known immigrants to New England from 1620-1640. Anderson not only utilizes the scholarship of the last hundred years, but also looks again at original records to provide a fresh, detailed, documented and insightful look at the Great Migration figures and their families.

Hollick, Martin E., *New Englanders in the 1600s: A Guide to Genealogical Research Published Between 1980 and 2010* (expanded edition; Boston: NEHGS, 2012) An extension of the work done by Clarence Almon Torrey that covers the most recent scholarship published from 1980 to 2010.

Torrey, Clarence Almon, *New England Marriages Prior to 1700* (12 vol. manuscript; 1962) Torrey spent years combing the NEHGS library's book and manuscript collection, to compile this annotated list of approximately 38,000 marriages of New Englanders that occurred prior to 1700.

Colket, Meredith B., *Founders of Early American Families: Emigrants from Europe, 1607-1657* (revised edition; Cleveland, Ohio: General Court of the Order of Founders and Patriots, 1985) - This book is an alphabetical, annotated list of all known immigrants to what is now the east coast of the United States within the first fifty years of English settlement, beginning with the establishment of Jamestown in 1607.

Land Records:

Maintained on the local level (county or town), these record can be found through searches using online databases, microfilm, transcription form, or the record may still be on local level.

- **Grantor**- Individual(s) selling property
- **Grantee**- Individual(s) buying property

Some land record websites and repositories:

- www.familysearch.org

- Family History Library
- NEHGS Library
- <https://www.glorerecords.blm.gov/default.aspx> (Federal land)

Probate Records:

- **Wills and Testaments**- testator distributes his or her personal/real estate
- **Inventories** -A verified, itemized list of property
- **Administrations**
- **Decrees**
- **Distributions**
- **Guardianships** -Appointed by the court to oversee the affairs of a minor or a business of a person deemed incapable
- **Divorce**
- **Adoption**
- **Orders**

Some probate websites and repositories:

- www.familysearch.org
- Family History Library
- NEHGS Library
- www.americanancestors.org
- www.ancestry.com

Military Records:

- www.fold3.com
- <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>
- www.americanancestors.org

Step #6- Analyze and Draw your Conclusions

- Clearly stated Objective
- Recognition of Earlier Scholarship (Correct or Incorrect)
- Research Summary
 - What did you find?
 - What didn't you find?
- Address anomalies or mistakes in the research process
- Suggest Alternative Possibilities
- Conclusion
- Provide a Genealogical Summary