Building Your Genealogical Skills

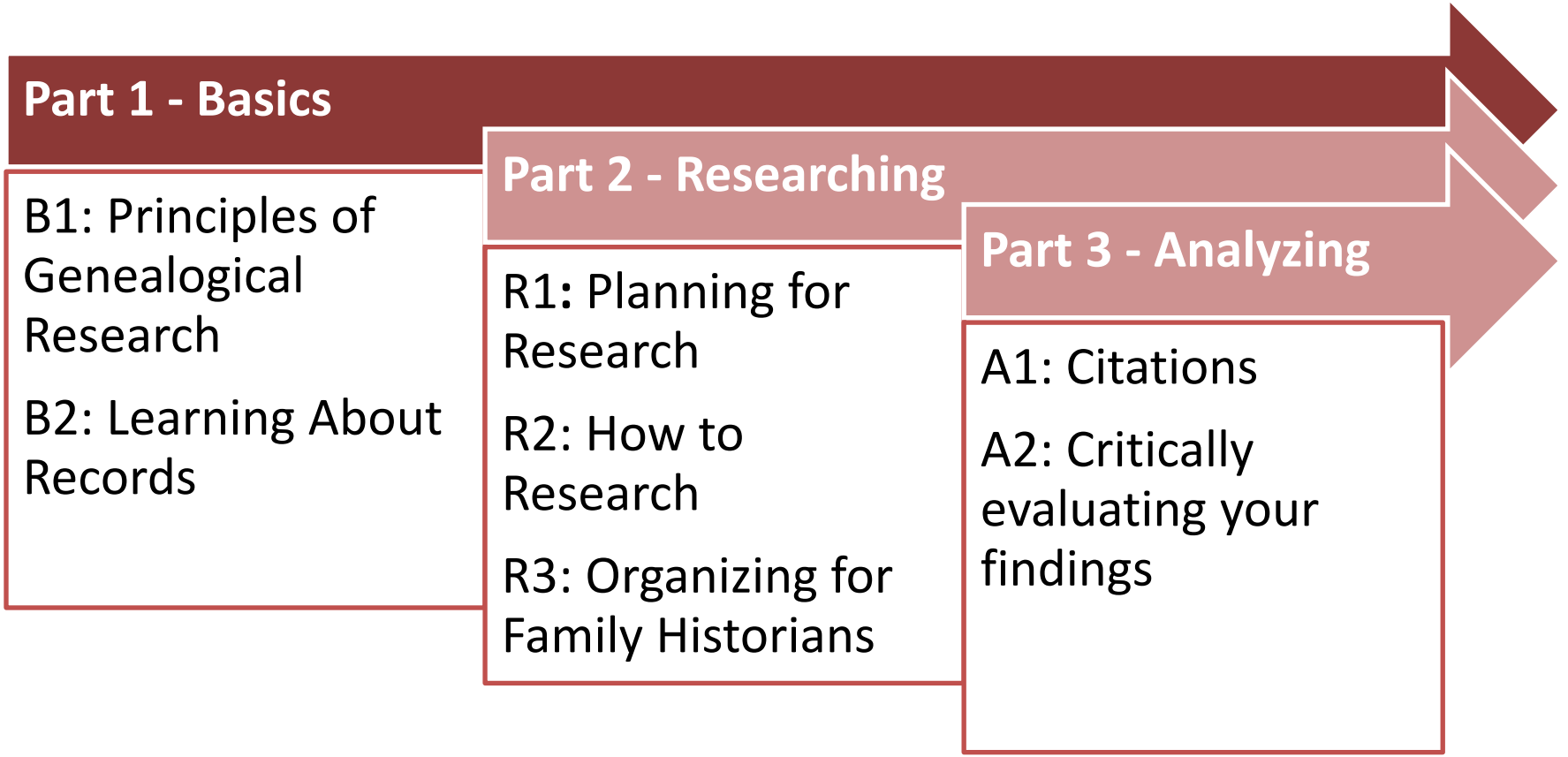
Research 1: Planning

Ann G. Lawthers, Genealogist

THE BRUE FAMILY LEARNING CENTER

American Ancestors®
by New England Historic Genealogical Society

Course Overview



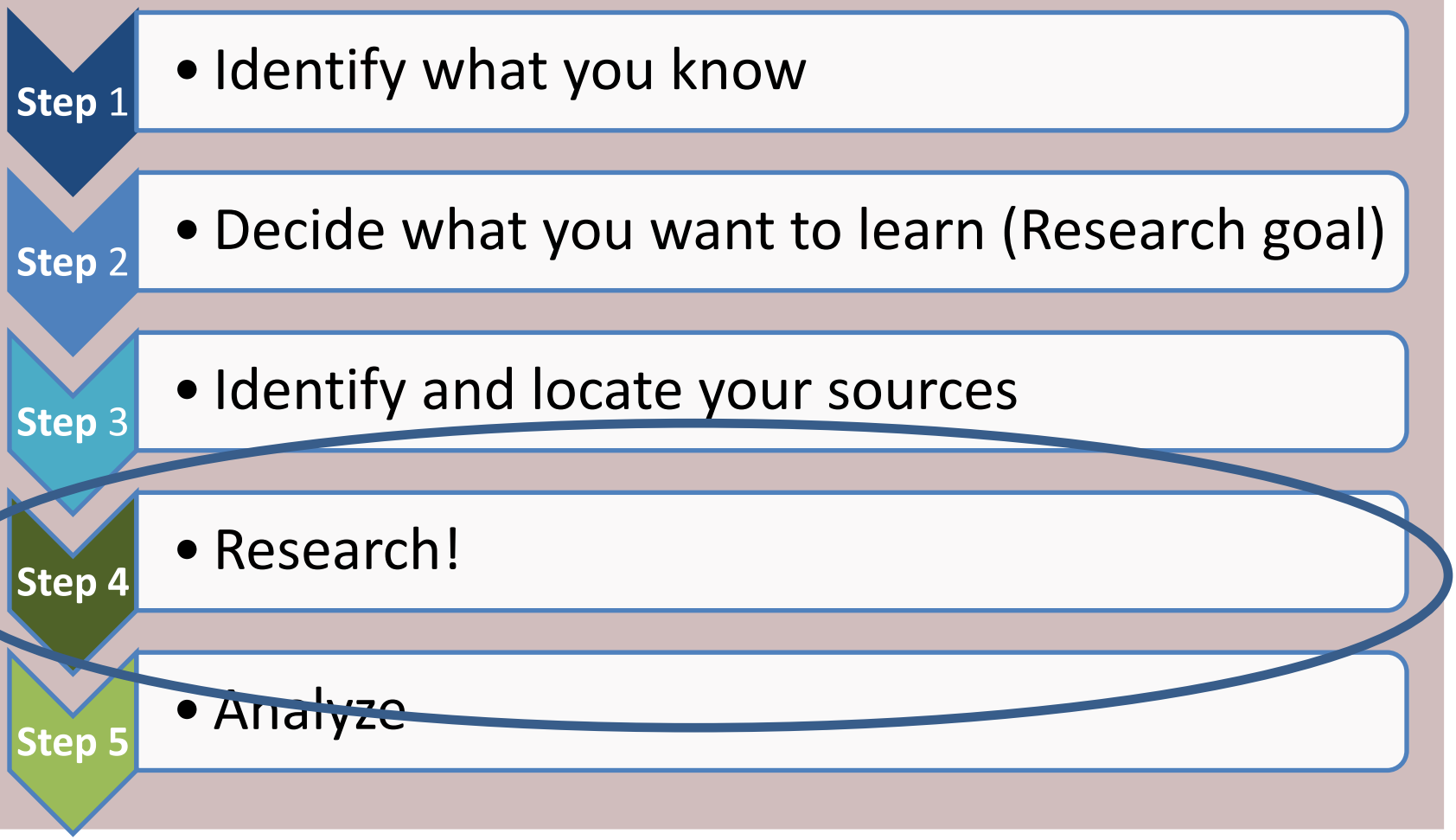
Module Roadmap

Crafting Research Questions

Planning Research

Where to Research

A Focus on Step Four



Step 4: Research!

- Is more than "searching"
- **What**: Make a plan to begin answering your questions
- **Where**: Online and other repositories
- **How**: General principles
  - Consult multiple sources
  - Gather as many records as possible about a family or individual that you can find
  - Track your work! (Research log)

What: Researching
Planning

Make a Plan

- What do you want to learn? (Goal)

Step 1

- What do you already know?

Step 2

- Do your background homework

Step 3

- Create your plan

Step 4

- Execute and fine tune your plan

Step 5

Step 1: Creating Good Research Questions

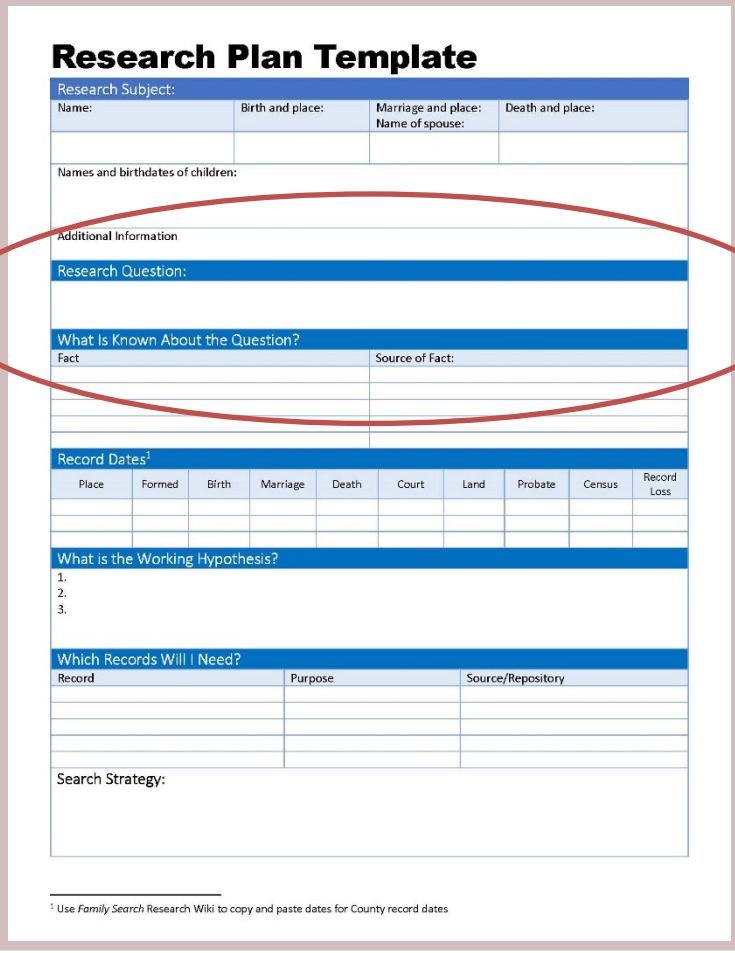
- Make the question specific, answerable, realistic, timely
- Include name, place and date in the question
- Focus on genealogical questions, e.g.:
  - Identity
  - Kinship
  - Events
- Focus on a person

Sample Question

- Who are the parents of Elizabeth Harris who married Martin Powell in Manchester Vermont in 1778?
- Name (s)
- Place
- Date

Research Plan Template

- Research subject
- ✓ Research question
- What is known about the question (and how it is known)
- Record dates – for reference
- Working hypotheses
- Which records will I need
- Search strategy



Research Plan Template

Research Subject:			
Name:	Birth and place:	Marriage and place: Name of spouse:	Death and place:

Names and birthdates of children:

Additional Information

Research Question:

What Is Known About the Question?

Fact	Source of Fact:

Record Dates[1]

Place	Formed	Birth	Marriage	Death	Court	Land	Probate	Census	Record Loss

What is the Working Hypothesis?

1.
2.
3.

Which Records Will I Need?

Record	Purpose	Source/Repository

Search Strategy:

[1] Use *Family Search* Research Wiki to copy and paste dates for County record dates

Step 2: What Do You Already Know?

- About Subject
  - Identify the *Where* and the *When* for your subject
    - Helpful to list vital events – with *place*
    - Name of spouse(s)
    - Names and dob(s) for children
- About the Question
  - Not just what you know, but HOW you know it
  - Focus on what is relevant to the Research Question

What is Known About Subject?

Research Subject:			
Name:	Birth and place:	Marriage and place: Name of spouse:	Death and place:
Elizabeth Harris	Ca 1738, place unknown	1 Mar 1778, Manchester, Vermont Martin Powell	Unknown
Names and birthdates of children: Silas b. ca 1779 – Manchester, VT Electa b. ca 1781 – Manchester, VT Sarah b. ca 1782 – Manchester, VT			
Additional Information			

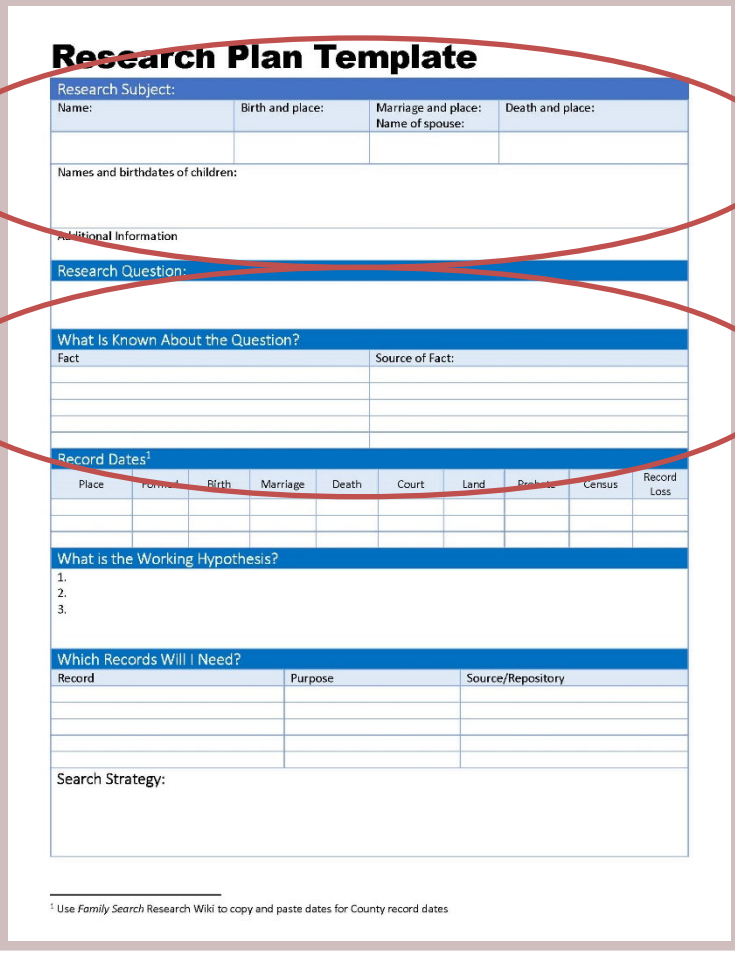
What is Known About the Question?

Research Question:
Who are the parents of Elizabeth Harris?

What Is Known About the Question?	
Fact	Source of Fact:
Her husband, Martin Powell was born in Amenia, NY	Find a Grave
Martin's first wife was Rhoda Thompson who died in 1777 in Manchester, VT	Vermont Vital Records
Rhoda may have married Martin in Amenia, NY	Ancestry tree

Research Plan Template

- ✓ Research subject
- • Research question
- ✓ What is known about the question (and how it is known)
- • Record dates – for reference
- • Working hypotheses
- • Which records will I need
- • Search strategy



Research Plan Template

Research Subject:			
Name:	Birth and place:	Marriage and place: Name of spouse:	Death and place:
Names and birthdates of children:			
Additional Information			

Research Question:

What Is Known About the Question?	
Fact	Source of Fact:

Record Dates[1]

Place	Formed	Birth	Marriage	Death	Court	Land	Probate	Census	Record Loss

What is the Working Hypothesis?

1.
2.
3.

Which Records Will I Need?

Record	Purpose	Source/Repository

Search Strategy:

[1] Use *Family Search* Research Wiki to copy and paste dates for County record dates

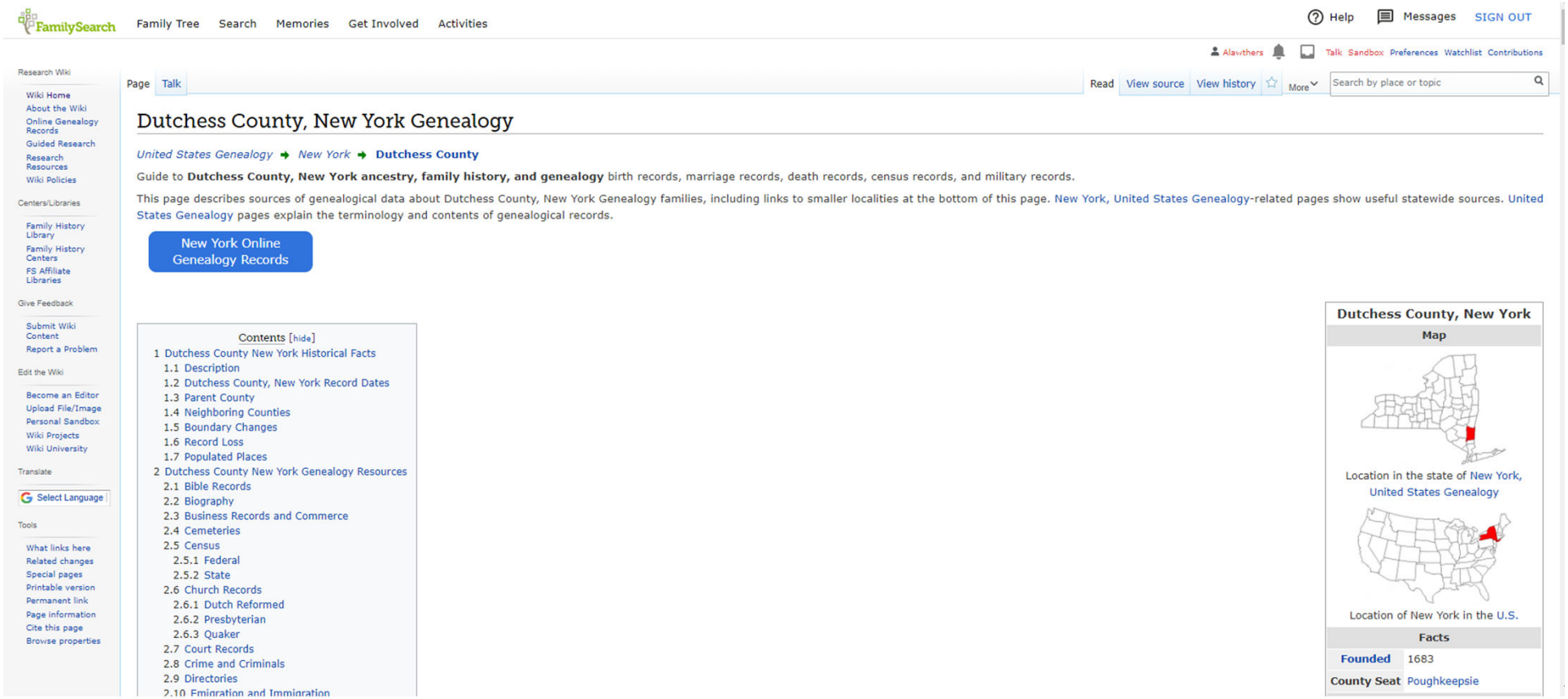
Step 3: Background Homework

- Learn about the place and time
- Learn about the geography (get a map)
- What do we think happened? (Hypothesis)
- Which records are most likely to have the answer?
- Where are those records? Which repositories?

Learning About a Place

- Date community was founded
- Dates of earliest records
- Any record loss issues

Finding Records Dates



Dutchess County, NY Wiki

Bennington County, Vermont Record Dates [edit | edit source]

Known Beginning Dates for Major County Records[2]						
Birth*	Marriage	Death*	Court	Land	Probate	Census
at town creation	at town creation	at town creation	1861	1782	1778	1790
*Statewide registration for births and deaths began in 1857. General compliance year is unknown.						

Contents [hide]

1 Description
2 Bennington County, Vermont Record Dates
3 County Courthouse
4 Quick Facts
  4.1 Parent County
  4.2 Boundary Changes
  4.3 Record Loss

Bennington County, Vermont

Map

Location in the state of Vermont, United States Genealogy

Facts

Founded	February 11, 1779
County Seat	Bennington

Record Loss [edit | edit source]

There is no known history of courthouse disasters in this county.

Bennington County, VT

Dutchess County New York Historical Facts [edit | edit source]

Description [edit | edit source]

The County was named for Mary of Modena, Duchess of York - the term Dutchess is an archaic form of the word duchess. The

Dutchess County, New York Record Dates [edit | edit source]

Known Beginning Dates for Major County Records[2]						
Birth*	Marriage	Death*	Court	Land	Probate	Census
1880	1908	1880	1730	1718	1752	1663

*Statewide registration for births and deaths started in 1880. General compliance for bi

Contents [hide]

1 Dutchess County New York Historical Facts
- 1.1 Description
- 1.2 Dutchess County, New York Record Dates
- 1.3 Parent County
- 1.4 Neighboring Counties
- 1.5 Boundary Changes
- 1.6 Record Loss
- 1.7 Populated Places

Record Loss [edit | edit source]

The county courthouse in Poughkeepsie was burned in an 1806 fire. No public records were destroyed.[4]

Dutchess County, New York

Map

Location in the state of New York, United States Genealogy

Location of New York in the U.S.

Facts	
Founded	1683
County Seat	Poughkeepsie

Dutchess County, NY

Record Dates									
Place	Formed	Birth	Marriage	Death	Court	Land	Probate	Census	Record Loss
Bennington, VT	1779	at town creation	at town creation	at town creation	1861	1782	1778	1790	None
Dutchess, NY	1663	1880	1908	1880	1730	1718	1752	1663	None

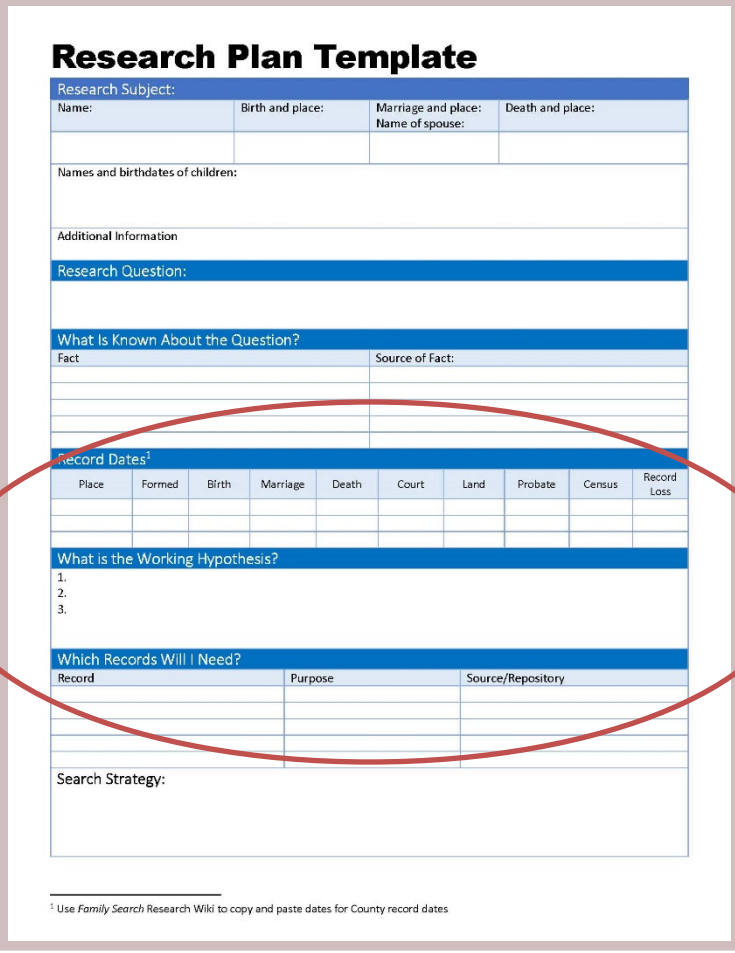
Dates in template

Hypothesis Example

What is the Working Hypothesis?
1. Elizabeth Harris was a widow in Manchester, Vermont, when she married Martin Powell in 1778 2. Elizabeth Harris was a spinster when she married Martin Powell

Research Plan Template

- Research subject
- Research question
- What is known about the question (and how it is known)
- ✓ Record dates – for reference
- ✓ Working hypotheses
- Which records will I need
- Search strategy



Research Plan Template

Research Subject:			
Name:	Birth and place:	Marriage and place: Name of spouse:	Death and place:
Names and birthdates of children:			
Additional Information			
Research Question:			
What Is Known About the Question?			
Fact		Source of Fact:	

Record Dates[1]									
Place	Formed	Birth	Marriage	Death	Court	Land	Probate	Census	Record Loss

What is the Working Hypothesis?
1. 2. 3.

Which Records Will I Need?		
Record	Purpose	Source/Repository

Search Strategy:

[1] Use *Family Search* Research Wiki to copy and paste dates for County record dates

Which Records (Basic)

Which Records Will I Need?		
Record	Purpose	Source/Repository
Marriage records of Manchester Vermont	First marriage of Elizabeth Harris	FamilySearch.org, AmericanAncestors.org or Ancestry.com
Vital records of Amenia, NY	First marriage or any mention of Harris family	FamilySearch.org, AmericanAncestors.org or Ancestry.com
Town history of Manchester, VT	Any mention of the Harris family	HathiTrust.org or local historical society

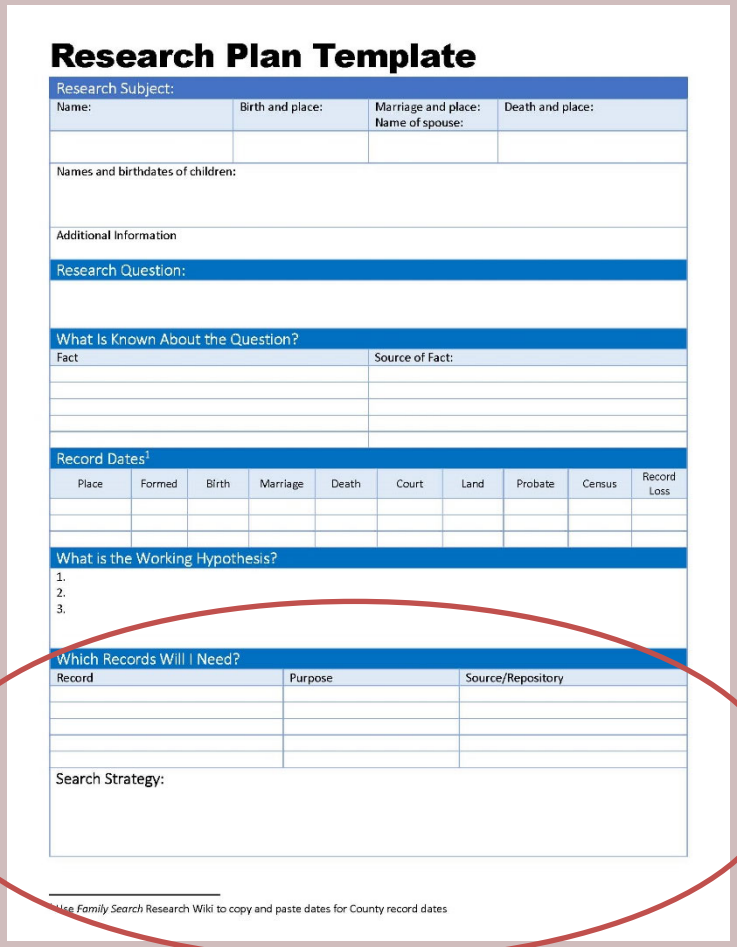
Which Records (Advanced)

Which Records Will I Need?

Record	Purpose	Source/Repository
Card index to vital statistics in the early land and town records books, Manchester Vermont	First marriage of Elizabeth Harris	https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/664510?availability=Family%20History%20Library
Vital records, 1749-1786 of Amenia, NY	First marriage or any mention of Harris family	https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/380341?availability=Family%20History%20Library
John S. Pettibone, "Early History of Manchester," Proceedings of the Vermont Historical Society 1930 Vol 1 (4), page 158	Any mention of the Harris family	https://vermonthistory.org/journal/misc/EarlyHistoryOfManchester.pdf

Research Plan Template

- Research subject
- Research question
- What is known about the question (and how it is known)
- Record dates – for reference
- Working hypotheses
- ✓ Which records will I need
- ✓ Search strategy



Research Plan Template

Research Subject:			
Name:	Birth and place:	Marriage and place: Name of spouse:	Death and place:
Names and birthdates of children:			
Additional Information			

Research Question:

What Is Known About the Question?	
Fact	Source of Fact:

Record Dates[1]									
Place	Formed	Birth	Marriage	Death	Court	Land	Probate	Census	Record Loss

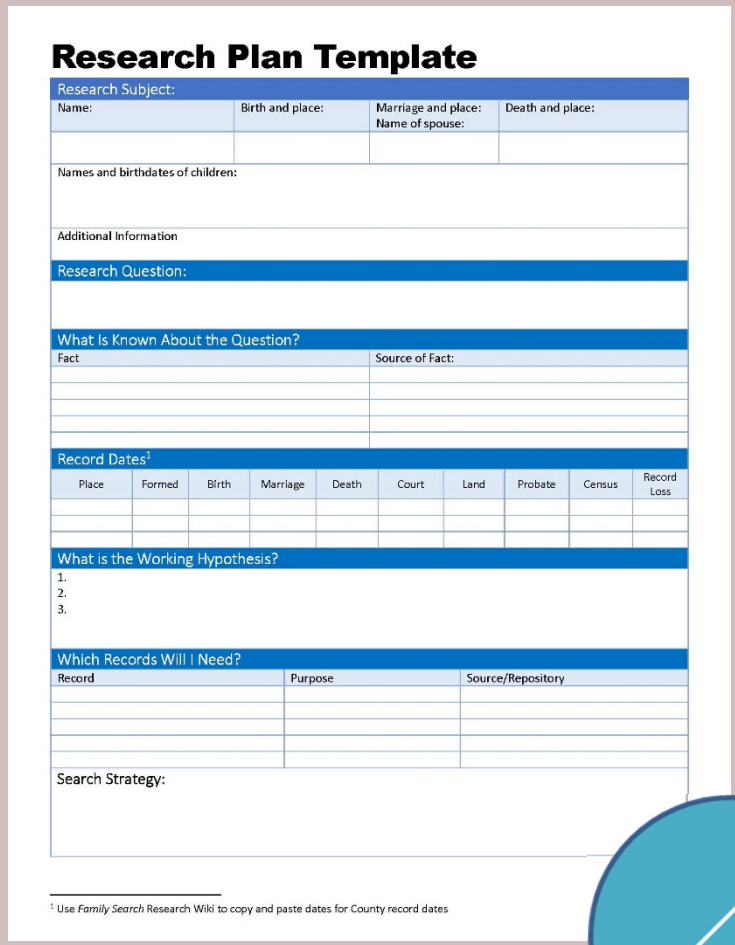
What is the Working Hypothesis?
1. 2. 3.

Which Records Will I Need?		
Record	Purpose	Source/Repository
Search Strategy:		

[1] Use *Family Search* Research Wiki to copy and paste dates for County record dates

Put it Together

- ✓ Research subject
- ✓ Research question
- ✓ What is known about the question (and how it is known)
- ✓ Record dates – for reference
- ✓ Working hypotheses
- ✓ Which records will I need
- ✓ Search strategy



Research Plan Template

Research Subject:			
Name:	Birth and place:	Marriage and place: Name of spouse:	Death and place:
Names and birthdates of children:			
Additional Information			

Research Question:

What Is Known About the Question?	
Fact	Source of Fact:

Record Dates[1]

Place	Formed	Birth	Marriage	Death	Court	Land	Probate	Census	Record Loss

What is the Working Hypothesis?
1. 2. 3.

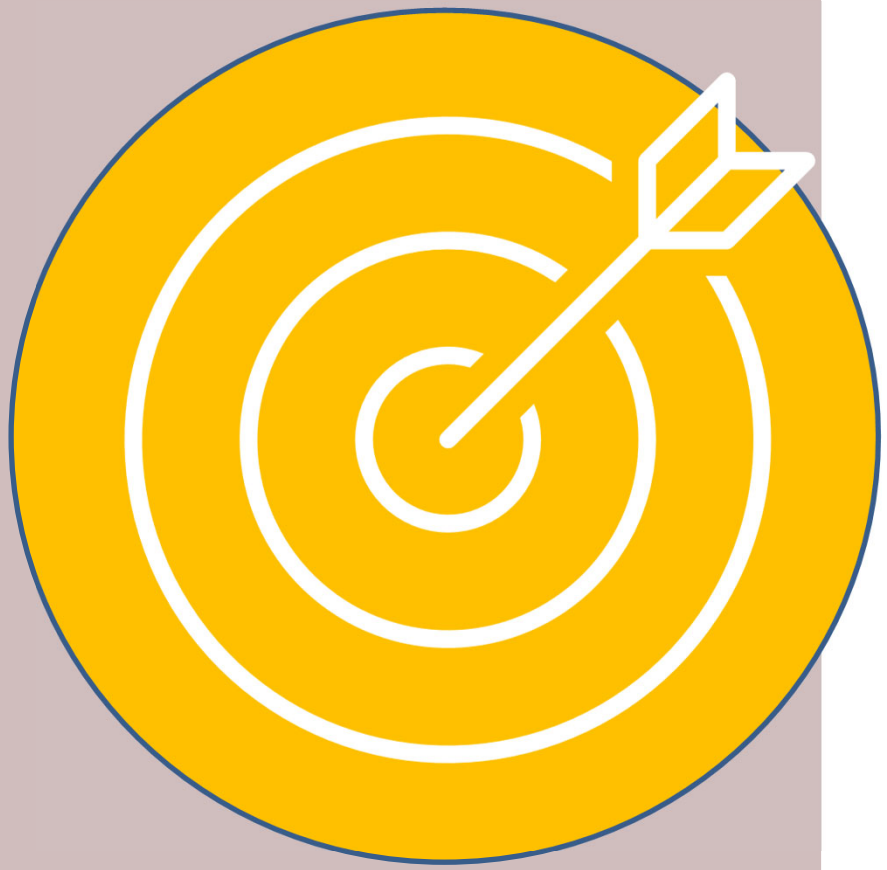
Which Records Will I Need?		
Record	Purpose	Source/Repository

Search Strategy:

[1] Use *Family Search* Research Wiki to copy and paste dates for County record dates

Keep a Research Log

- Keeps track of what you have searched and what you have found
  - Write down search strings
- Prevents rework
- Record negative findings
- Cites sources
- Can be a roadmap for the research process



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Research Log

Repository: _____ **Date:** _____

Source Information (title, author, publisher, publication date, etc.)	**Call Number** (film number, URL, etc.)	**Objective**	**Results**

What to Fill In Before Viewing a Record

- Person/Place/Event focus of search
- Date
- **Source/Repository** – e.g. Ancestry: 1870 census – New Albany, Indiana
- Call Number (if any)
- **Objective** - write the person or event you seek for **each** search so you will later know whether you need to search the same source again for a different person or event.

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Person

Research Log

~~Repository~~: Elizabeth Harris Date:

Source Information (title, author, publisher, publication date, etc.)	Call Number (film number, URL, etc.)	Objective	Results
Card index to vital statistics in the early land and town records books, Manchester, Vermont	https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/664510?availability=Family%20History%20Library	First marriage of Elizabeth Harris	Null
Vital records, 1749-1786 of Amenia, NY	https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/380341?availability=Family%20History%20Library	First marriage or any mention of Harris family	Null
John S. Pettibone, "Early History of Manchester," Proceedings of the Vermont Historical Society 1930 Vol 1 (4), page 158	https://vermonthistory.org/journal/misc/EarlyHistoryOfManchester.pdf	Any mention of the Harris family	Bingo - Elizabeth Harris was sister of Esquire Powel's second wife was the widow of Joseph Harris and sister to Isaac Whelpley. Captain Isaac Burton married her daughter, Rachel Harris.

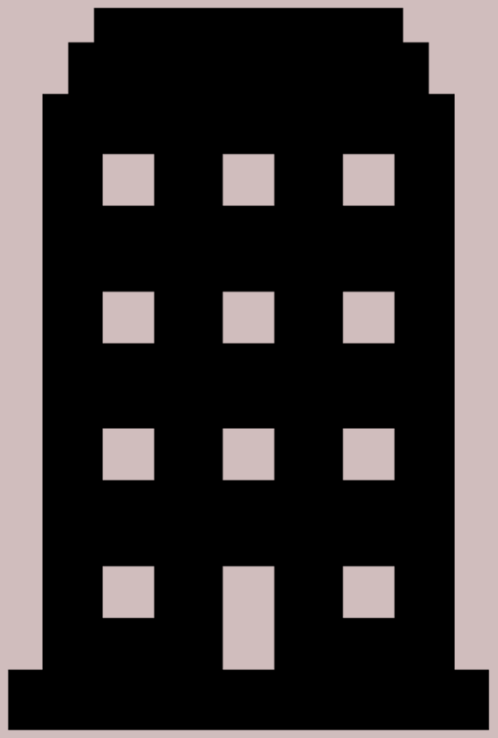
Bingo - "Esquire Powel's second wife was the widow of Joseph Harris and sister to Isaac Whelpley. Captain Isaac Burton married her daughter, Rachel Harris."

Research Log in Process

Where: Repositories

Types of Repositories

Brick and Mortar

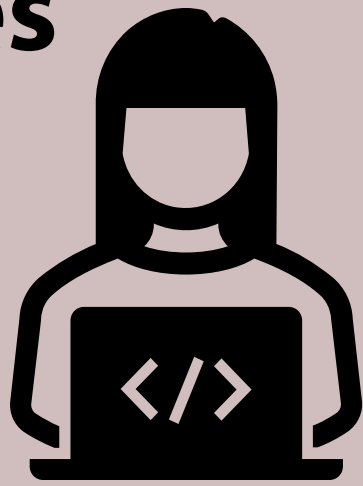


Online

Selected Types of Brick-and-Mortar Repositories

- Your house!
- 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

Online Repositories



- "Big 3" general genealogy websites
  - *Ancestry.com* ($)
  - *FamilySearch.org* (free)
  - *AmericanAncestors.org* ($, guest option)
- Location-specific websites
  - Archives of a particular state, county, or city, e.g., Washington State Digital Archives, Missouri Digital Heritage, Baton Rouge Digital Archive
  - Also applies to other countries, e.g., IrishGenealogy.ie
- Record-specific websites
  - Fold3.com (military records)

Coming Up Next – Module 4 How to Research

NEW ENGLAND HISTORIC GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

AmericanAncestors.org

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