

Getting Started in Family History Research

Class 3: Identify and locate your sources

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Look for Missing Information

Define what you are looking for

- Birth date/place
- Marriage date/place
- Death date/place
- Maiden name
- Military service
- Education
- Parent's names
- Parent's place of birth
- Immigration year
- Naturalization status
- Sibling's names
- Children's names

What will help us find what we are looking for:

Information Needed	Search These Records First	Then Search These Records
Age	Census, Vital Records, Cemeteries	Military Records, Taxation
Birth date and place	Vital Records	Cemeteries, Newspapers, Census
Country of foreign birth	Naturalization Records, Vital Records, Census	Military Records, Vital Records, Newspapers
Death date and place	Vital Records, Cemeteries, Probate Records, Newspapers	Newspapers, Bible Records, Military Records
Foreign birth location	Vital Records, Published Genealogies, Biographies, Naturalization, Immigration, Census	Vital Records, Newspapers, History, Emigration and Immigration
Immigration date	Census, Immigration, Naturalization	Newspapers, Biographies
Maiden name	Vital Records, Newspapers	Cemeteries, Military Records, Probate Records
Marriage date and place	Vital Records, Census, Newspapers	Cemeteries, Military Records, Probate Records, Naturalization, Land
Parents' names	Vital Records, Census, Probate Records, Newspapers, Published Genealogies	Emigration
Places family has lived	Census, Land, Local Histories, Directories	Military Records, Taxation, Obituaries

Importance of Place

- **Your research question will inevitably involve a particular place**
 - Historians often use places to refine their questions (Why did this happen here? What can we learn about X by focusing on this location?)
 - Place provides context for understanding your research subject (How did the place of residence affect what that person did, how they lived?)
- **You will need to locate sources from that place**
 - Search by subject: place

Learning About a Place

- Establish what date community was founded
- What was the name of the original town that community was created from
- Dates of earliest records
- Any record loss issues for these locations

Where are the records located?

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

Understanding Place-Names, Boundaries, and Administrative Divisions

Understanding Place-Names

As researchers examining the past, both genealogists and historians must have an understanding of place-names. A research question will inevitably involve a particular place. However, place-names may have changed over time, making an understanding of place-name and boundary changes important to developing a successful research question and carrying out a historical or genealogical research project. Determining where your research subject lived and what the administrative structure was for that place will help you locate relevant primary sources.

Administrative Divisions

- Records maintained at different administrative levels – must know exactly where to look to find your ancestor, and what you can expect to find there

Place-Name Categories

- Any level of name might change, from street name to country
- Your ancestor might never have moved off the same piece of land, but because jurisdictions or place-names have been changed, it *looks* like your ancestor moved
- Outside the U.S., there are similar levels of administration
 - Germany: *Stadt* (city), *Kreis* (county), *Land* (state)



- Ireland: townland, civil parish, county
- Street address
- Municipality aka town/village/city
- (Parish)
- (County)
- State
- (Region)
- Country

Place Name Terminology

- **Parent [town/county]** – town from which another town is created
- **Daughter [town/county]** – town that is created from another town
- **Annex (v.)** – land from one municipality becomes part of another
- **Extinct** – town/county no longer exists as a legal entity
- **Exonym** – *external* name for a geographical place (Germany vs. Deutschland) Incorporated town vs. unincorporated community

Why do place names change?

- **In general, at any level of administration**
 - Boundaries are redrawn or a new community is incorporated/disincorporated
 - Population outgrows the original name
 - Standardization
 - Memorialization of a person or event
 - To avoid confusion
 - Wars/political regimes

How does a name change affect my research?

- **Knowing whether there was movement helps us determine where to find records and determine migrations**
 - Did my ancestor move, or were boundaries redrawn?

County Names

- **County records are crucial sources for genealogists**
 - In most states, court, land, and probate are maintained at the county level
 - Sometimes vital records are also held at the county rather than municipal level
- **County: Administrative division between town and state**
 - Boston, Suffolk County, Massachusetts
 - Parish (Louisiana), Borough (Alaska)
- **Consolidated city-county**
 - Both a municipal corporation (city) and an administrative division of a state (county)
 - Coterminous borders
 - NYC, NY; New Orleans, LA; Denver, CO; Washington, DC

- Creation of a new county usually reflects a growing state population (administrative responsibilities are too much for the existing county)
- **Often: a large county is formed at the time of statehood, many daughter counties are formed, original county may or may not remain in existence**
 - Tryon County, New York
 - Augusta County, Virginia

Country Names

- U.S. has retained the name since independence in 1776
- **In Europe, name changes more common, and continue into the 20th century**
 - Formal creation of modern European countries in the late 19th century (Germany, Italy)
 - WWI and WWII draw new boundaries and create new countries
 - Policy of self-determination
 - Czechoslovakia (1918), Czech Republic and Slovakia (1993)
 - Dalmatia (1815, part of Austria-Hungary), part of Yugoslavia (1918), Croatia (1991)

Where: Repositories

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

Some Types of Repositories

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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)

Large Genealogical Websites

- *AmericanAncestors.org*
- *Ancestry.com*
- *FamilySearch.org*
- *Findmypast.co.uk*
- *Fold3.com*
- *Rootsireland.ie*
- *Findagrave.com*
- *Genealogybank.com*
- *Newspapers.com*
- *ScotlandsPeople.gov.uk*

Locating Reference Materials

Research Guides and Aids

- Don’t reinvent the wheel – make use of guides and aids created by researchers and historians
- Location-specific genealogy guides
- More recent scholarly history and geography books
 - Check the footnotes to see where the author gets his information
- Recent gazetteers

Websites:

- FamilySearch: <https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/>
- American Ancestors - Library Catalog: <http://library.nehgs.org/>
- American Ancestors – Research Guides: <https://www.americanancestors.org/tools/research-guides>
- American Ancestors – Video Library: <https://www.americanancestors.org/video-library>
- OCLC World Cat: <https://search.worldcat.org/>
- Archive Grid: <https://researchworks.oclc.org/archivegrid/>



eBooks

- HathiTrust: <https://www.hathitrust.org/>
- Google Books: <https://books.google.com/>
- Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/index.php>
- Open Library: <https://openlibrary.org/>
- FamilySearch: <https://books.familysearch.org>
- Smithsonian Institute: <https://library.si.edu/books-online>

Tip: Update your research plan as you go!

Using a Research Log

Benefits of 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
- Categories of research logs
 - Person
 - Place
 - Family
 - Event
 - Repository
 - General

What to Fill In Before Viewing a Record

- Main objective: Person/Place/Event focus of search
- Date
- Source/Repository – e.g. Ancestry: 1870 census – New Albany, Indiana
- Call Number (if any)
- Detailed objectives - 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.



Bibliography

Published Resources: Research Guides and Gazetteers

Jay Androit, comp., *Township Atlas of the United States*, McLean, Va.: Documents Index, Inc., 1991.

Alice Eichholz, ed., *Red Book: American State, County, and Town Sources*, (3rd ed.), Provo, UT: Ancestry, 2004).

P. William Filby, comp., *A Bibliography of American County Histories*, (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1987).

Naomi Joshi, ed., *New York Family History Research Guide and Gazetteer*, (New York, NY: NYG&B, 2015, [Rev. ed. (2017) available as an e-book only]).

Rhonda McClure, ed., *Genealogist's Handbook for New England Research*, (6th ed.), Boston, MA: NEHGS, 2022).

Kory Meyerink, ed., *Printed Sources: A Guide to Published Genealogical Records*, (Salt Lake City, UT: Ancestry, 1998).

Loretto Dennis Szucs & Sandra Hargreaves, *The source : a guidebook to American genealogy* (Provo, UT : Ancestry, 2006).

William Thorndale and William Dollarhide, *Map Guide to the U.S. Federal Censuses, 1790-1920*, (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1987).

Web Resources: Guides and Research Aids

RedBook: American State, County, and Town Sources,
[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)

FamilySearch Wiki, https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Main_Page

Cyndi's List: Migration Routes, Roads, and Trails, <https://www.cyndislist.com/migration/>

Web Resources: Maps and Gazetteers

Map of US [Historical Atlases and Maps of U.S. and States], <https://www.mapofus.org/>

The Newberry Library: Atlas of Historical County Boundaries,
<https://publications.newberry.org/ahcbp/index.html>

TopoView [USGS Topographical Map Collection],
<https://ngmdb.usgs.gov/topoview/viewer/#15/30.3670/-91.0888>

Library of Congress [Digital Collections: Maps],
<https://www.loc.gov/collections/?fa=partof:geography+and+map+division>

David Rumsey [Historical Map Collection], <https://www.davidrumsey.com/>

Old Maps Online, <https://www.oldmapsonline.org/>

Norman B. Leventhal Map & Education Center, <https://www.leventhalmap.org/>

General Land Office Records, Bureau of Land Management [Survey Plats], <https://glorerecords.blm.gov/>

Cyndi's List: Maps & Geography, <https://www.cyndislist.com/maps/>

Meyers Gazetteer [Gazetteer of the German Empire], <https://s.meyersgaz.org/>

JewishGen Communities Database, <https://www.jewishgen.org/communities/Search.asp>

Irish Townlands, <https://www.townlands.ie/>

Gazetteer of British Place Names, <https://www.gazetteer.org.uk/>