

Piecing Together the Story: Analyzing Records and Drawing Conclusions

Class 3: Filling in the Gaps Between Records

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Records like the census, city directories, tax records, and more can provide precious information about our ancestors. However, you may find that your ancestors' circumstances changed quite a bit during the "gaps" between the records. Between one census and the next your ancestor may have moved to a different state, married, had children, and been widowed. In these situations, we need to turn to other records to understand the context of these changes and "fill in the gaps."

Types of Records to "Fill in the Gap"

Church Membership Records

- When they joined the church. This may indicate they arrived in the community.
- Who their spouse(s) were.
- Did their children get baptized in the parish and join the church?
- Church disciplinary action against them?
- When they moved to another church or died

Census Records

- The U.S. federal census created in 1790 has been a valuable tool for tracking the movement of families across the United States.
- After 1850, the entire household was named, not simply the head of household.
- Starting in 1880 the U.S. Census included the relationship to the head of household.

Tax Records

- Tax records should be treated as a census substitute (ex. 1890 Census)
- They place someone in a specific location and year (sometimes down to the month)
- Annually recorded in most cases. Good to use between the decennial census records.

Financial Wealth

- Tax records can help lead you to land deeds, to learn more about an ancestor's property
- Many tax records describe the types of buildings that the taxpayer had (house, mill, etc.), sometimes down to the acreage

Build a Timeline

- You can follow the taxpayer over multiple years to build a timeline of their life.
- Free white males 16 or older were required to pay taxes in colonial America
- Free white single or widowed women also paid taxes (*femme sole* status)
- The absence of someone from a tax record usually indicates someone moved or died

Land Records – Proprietor Records and Deeds

Who Were Proprietors?

- The colony courts assigned grants of land to groups of settlers.
- These settlers formed Proprietorship Committees to distribute land to settle towns.
- These records in many cases pre-date the county deeds recorded for a community.

Where to find Proprietor Records

- Town halls, town clerk, tax office of assessor office
- County Registry of Deeds
- Libraries and local historical Societies
- Family History Library Microfilm / Digital
- Published transcriptions

Tips:

- Tax Records can indicate when your ancestor was paying Real Estate Tax
- Your ancestor did not need to reside in a community to own land there. Allowing you to see movement out of a community.
- Use Proprietor records to determine the earliest date of settlement for your family in the 17th and 18th century.

Land Measurements

- **1 mile:** 80 chains, 320 poles, rods or perches = 5,280 ft.
- **1 chain:** 4 poles, rods perches is 66 ft., or 100 links.
- **1 pole, rod or perch:** 25 links, 16 ½ ft.
- **1 link:** 7.92 inches

Analyzing Land Deeds

- Note where the buyer and seller's residence is at the time of the sale. This is a key clue for identifying migration.

- Look for deeds where a husband is selling property. If his wife is living, first name will be referenced in the deed and/or the court inquiry to release her dower.
- Note the deed witnesses and abutting neighbors. They may be relatives of either party.
- Look for phrases like "in consideration of natural affection" to identify family members.
- Quit claim and power of attorney deeds are useful for documenting the children of a deceased parent.

Published County Histories – “Mug Books”

“Mug Books”

- Mug- The face or mouth of a person informal; M-W
- Mug Books- county history books which included biographical sketches of residents. They were sold by subscription in advance of printing at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th centuries A to Zax (p. 180)

President U.S. Grants’ Centennial Proclamation

- May 1876- President Grant endorsed a congressional resolution recommending that every county and town produce- “an historical sketch of said county or town from its formation”

Patriotic and Democratic

- Self-made success- not just of the man, but also the county/town
- Immigrants were included as pioneers
- Rural, small town accomplishment
- Part of the larger, national narrative

Who were included?

- White males (some females-spinsters/widowers)
- Farmers, small businessmen, professionals (such as lawyers and doctors), teachers, and religious officials.
- Living persons (some in memoriam)

Information Included

- Place and date of birth
- Names of parents, siblings, and children (sometimes grandchildren)
- Ancestry

- Political affiliation
- Occupation and place of residence
- Migration history
- Military service
- Marriage information
- Fraternal organizations

Popularity of Mug Books

- 'Representative Citizens' - 500-1000 subscriptions were essential to the profitability of the book
- Prosperity- Midwest \$\$, Southern States during Reconstruction had limited funds (depending on the book, \$25 sketch and \$125 portrait and sketch)
- Small, rural towns- Northeast and Mid-Atlantic are not as well represented because of their demography

City and Town Directories

- City directories were first introduced in the United States in Boston in 1789. These earliest registers listed residents, their address and occupation.
- Later directories of the 19th century would often include whether the resident moved to another town/city, was currently in the military or even their date of death.
- Small towns directories were not published annually.
- Smaller cities or towns may be combined as a county directory or multiple towns combined as one volume.
- In smaller towns when published directories do not exist you can often turn to poll tax or voter lists as a substitute.
- Many U.S. city directories since 1789 are available from FamilySearch and Ancestry.com
- City directories are the forerunner to the telephone directories of the 20th-21st centuries

The Social Register

- The Social Register is a semi-annual, privately published directory of prominent American families.
- It originated in the late 19th century (first published in 1887 in New York City) as a way to document and maintain the social elite and distinguished social standing.
- The Social Register traditionally included names, addresses, club memberships, schools attended, and other details of individuals and families, serving as both a networking tool

and a marker of status. Admission wasn't by application but by invitation or acceptance from within—one had to be vouched for by existing members, making it a closed circle.

Military Records

U.S. Pension Records

- Show the movement of a veteran after their service.
- Often give various occupations, and the mention of all spouses.
- Vital records of the veteran and spouse are often given.

U.S. Military Lists

- Typically will include the birthplace of the veteran, their age, occupation, their residence at enlistment, and where they served in the military.

Bounty Land

- This land was often located where the veteran enlisted from, and occasionally where the veteran or his family settled.

Regimental Histories

- Popular post-Civil War for various regiments, both Union and Confederate.
- Will often contain biographical details on the soldier, and where they are living or if they had died.
- Often will contain photos of veteran from the era of their service.

Other "Gap" Fillers

- Obituaries from multiple newspapers
- Compiled Genealogies
- College Alumni Reunion Books
- Masonic Records
- Employment Records

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