

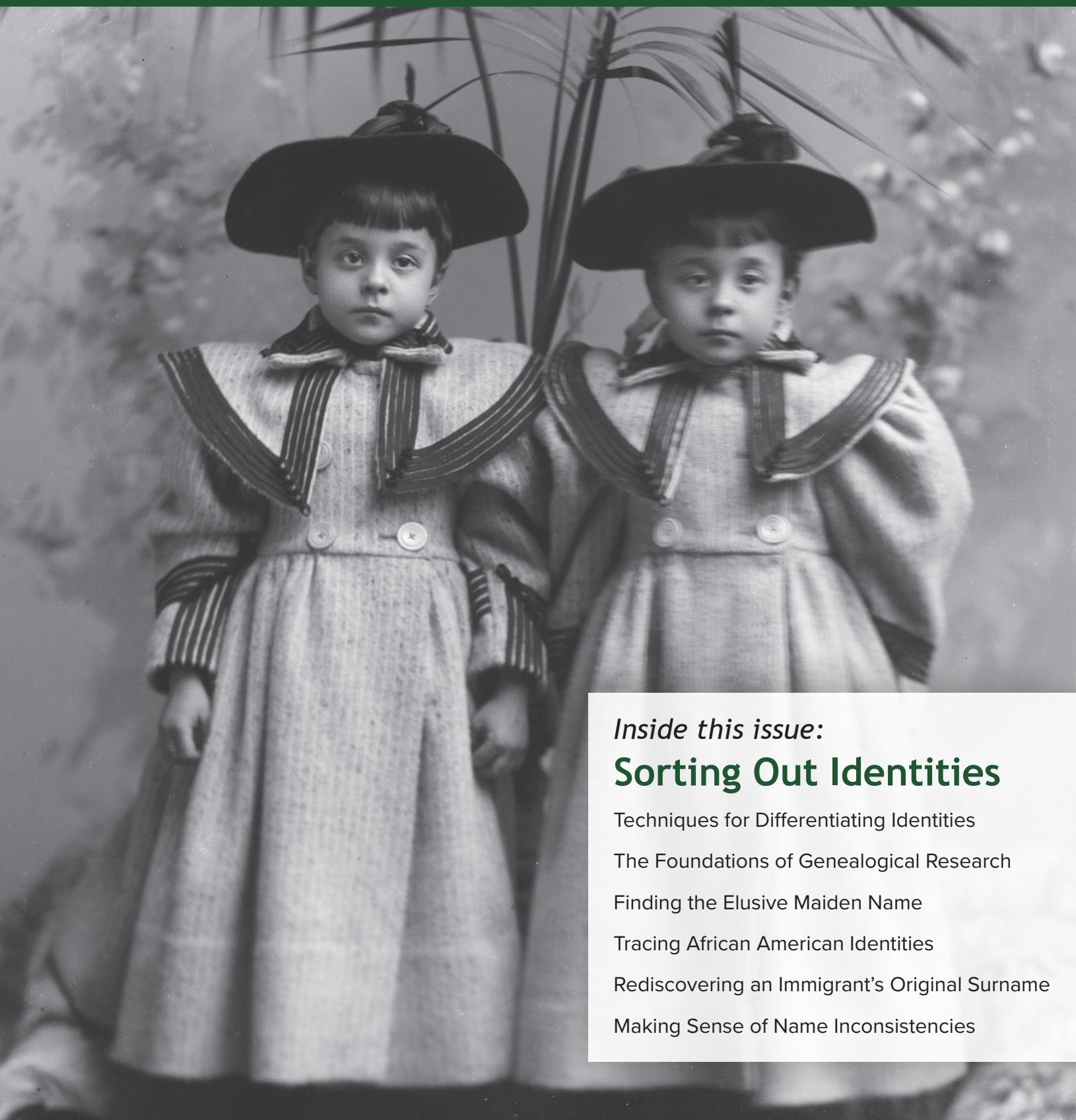


FOR GENERATIONS PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

# NGS Magazine

VOLUME 49, NUMBER 4

OCTOBER–DECEMBER 2023



*Inside this issue:*  
**Sorting Out Identities**

Techniques for Differentiating Identities

The Foundations of Genealogical Research

Finding the Elusive Maiden Name

Tracing African American Identities

Rediscovering an Immigrant's Original Surname

Making Sense of Name Inconsistencies



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# NGS

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Our mission is to inspire, connect, and lead the family history community. We foster collaboration and best practices in advocacy, education, preservation, and research. We enable people, cultures, and organizations to discover the past and create a lasting legacy. For Generations Past, Present, and Future.

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OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2023 · VOLUME 49, NUMBER 4

5. Were you a slave? If so, state the names of all former owners, and particularly the name of your owner at the date of your enlistment: *Yes, Blinged to Louis Cogdwell  
Deven miles from Paducah, NC*

6. Where were you discharged? Answer: *Yes - at Louisville Ky.*

7. Where have you lived since discharge? Give dates, as nearly as possible, of any changes of residence. *I have lived at Wilmington NC in the RR Rd Devon and Fullerton Cor Devon as place*

8. What is your present occupation? Answer: *Postal Pullman Devan*

9. What is your height? *five feet ten inches*. The color of your skin? *Brown*  
Are there any permanent marks or scars on your person? If so, describe them. *None*

10. Were you in the military or naval service under a name different from that by which you are now known? If so, state what it was. *Yes Jacob Cogdwell*

11. Have you ever been known by any names other than that given in your application for pension? If so, state them in full. *Yes by the name of Jacob Drew*

12. By what name are you now known? State it in full. *Jacob Drew*

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**Top of page:** Identity questions, Pension Application File for Private Jacob Drew (alias Cogdel), Company G, 135th U.S. Colored Infantry Regiment, *National Archives* (<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/24328149>).

**Cover:** "Portner twins," photographed by C. M. Bell Studio, Washington, DC between 1891 and 1894; *Library of Congress* (<https://www.loc.gov/resource/bellcm.05131>). Their surname and the studio's location led to further information, but it's not certain which twin is which in the photo. Anna Florence and Clara Louise Portner were born 23 May 1888 in Manassas, Virginia. Clara died at age ten in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Anna married Senator Henry De La Warr Flood of Virginia and was the last of the thirteen children of Robert Portner and Anna Von Valaer to die, in 1966. When Robert died in 1906, he was called "a retired merchant and capitalist of Washington and Manassas." Memorials of Clara Louise Portner, Anna Florence Portner Flood, and Robert Portner, *Find a Grave* (<https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/2447156/manassas-cemetery>).

## Autumn Changes



Fall heralds the start of the NGS awards season. It's time for our individual and organizational members to look around and take notice of the best in genealogy. Who are the stars in your locale who quietly work to preserve records or contribute in other ways to further family history research? Help us recognize excellence by submitting an application for a fitting award. For information and to download nomination forms, visit <https://www.ngsgenealogy.org/awards-competitions> and <https://www.ngsgenealogy.org/hall-of-fame>. The deadline for all submissions is 15 December 2023.

NGS welcomes Patricia R. Reed (Colorado), a professional genealogist and educator, as our new Education Course Manager. Patricia is taking the reins from Mary Kathryn Kozy who served in the position for the last two years. We wish Mary Kathryn the best as she moves on to other projects.

Carly Morgan (Utah) is the newest member of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee. Carly assisted NGS with social media during the 2022 Sacramento conference, where she presented "Three Chinese Women in America: Following the Paper Trail."

1 October 2023 marks the start of the newly elected Delegate Council Steering Committee (DCSC). Returning to serve are Ashley Craig (Virginia), Barbara "Judy" Quigley Fenner (Massachusetts), and Kate Huffman (Missouri) who will continue to serve as secretary. Karen Molohon (Georgia), who served as vice chair for the last year, is the incoming chair of the steering committee. Matt Weismantel (New Jersey) is the incoming vice chair; Kate Townsend (Pennsylvania), immediate past chair. New members are Kathleen Kaldis (Massachusetts), Charity Rouse (South Carolina), Amy Beth Urman (Arizona), Eric

Vaughn (New York), and Evan Wilson (California). Cheri Hudson Passey (South Carolina), vice president of Society and Organization Management, continues to serve as board liaison to the steering committee.

Much gratitude to the departing DCSC members: Sue Fitzpatrick, Stacy Cole, Jessica Collins, and Kristi Sexton.

I also want to thank and acknowledge Ashley Gonzalez (Florida) who has tendered her resignation from the NGS board of directors. We thank Ashley for her board service and wish her luck in her next endeavors.

A special thank you to all who celebrated the National Genealogical Society's 120<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with a financial gift. We exceeded our \$14,400 goal (\$120 from 120 members) by more than 25 percent and will be planting two hundred trees in honor of genealogists and ancestors.

I hope you were able to join the excellent MemberConnects! event with Steve Little's tutorial on the uses and limits of artificial intelligence for genealogy, held on 6 September 2023. With more than 425 in attendance, it set a new record for participation at an NGS membership meeting. If you missed it, the recording is on our YouTube channel at: <https://bit.ly/NGS-MemberConnects-AI-2023>.

Please be sure to save the dates for next year's NGS Virtual Family history Conference, Expanding Possibilities, 16–18 May 2024. 





## Course Program

### Foundations 101: Drawing Up the Family Blueprint

1. Getting Started
2. Home Sources
3. Family Stories, Traditions, and Interviews
4. Names and Establishing Identities
5. The Research Plan

### Foundations 102: Laying the Foundation

6. Analyzing Records
7. Using FamilySearch.org
8. Vital Records
9. Census Records
10. Newspapers
11. Cemetery Records

### Foundations 103: Framing in Your Family

12. Introduction to Probate Records
13. Religious Records
14. Published Sources and Manuscripts
15. Research Repositories: Online and Offline
16. DNA Basics
17. Writing and Sharing Research
18. Expanding Research into Other Records  
(land, military, immigration)

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**■ EDITOR'S NOTE | Deb Cyprich**

**N**ames are crucial but unreliable markers of identity. When several people had similar names in one area, genealogists risk choosing the wrong person (and the wrong ancestors). Individuals whose names or other identifying characteristics changed can be missed in records, and the trail may seem cold for people with unknown surnames. Sorting out identities correctly is a constant challenge.



Other markers of identity, such as occupation and economic status, can differentiate people more precisely than names alone. Shannon Green discusses three techniques that can help researchers separate same-named people from each other and merge identities that appear to differ.

A case study with a surprising conclusion demonstrates the necessity of determining places and dates as identity characteristics. During a search for the parents of a man with minimal information, Julia Bagwell zeroed in on dates and places to separate him from others with the same name.

Every genealogist has an ancestress whose unknown maiden name blocks research of her birth family. Ann Lawthers describes a variety of records that may reveal a wife's maiden name and recommends strategies specific to the search.

Sorting out the identities of African Americans with unrecorded, changed, and differing names requires knowledge of other distinguishing characteristics, particularly their kin. Tony Burroughs explores the complex history of African American naming and the resources that may help with identifying enslaved and free ancestors.

Immigrants often changed their names after arrival. Roslyn Torella investigates the typical reasons for changing names, the ways in which many names were changed, and the tools and resources for discovering the original surnames of immigrants.

Wrapping up the topic of sorting out identities, columnist Kathy Petlewski presents two case studies. One shows how changes in the spelling of a surname over time affect research, and the second recounts the evolution of the given names of eight siblings, including two who changed their first names entirely.

In other articles and columns, Robert Raymond explains the powerful set of tools researchers can adapt to improve outcomes, for searching the seven billion indexed historical records on FamilySearch; Cara Jones covers the value of local historical societies in genealogical research; Paul Woodbury provides instructions for DNA analysis, annotations, and citations; and Carla Cegielski outlines word lists, keyboards, and apps that can assist with translating records. 

## Celebrate Family History Month in October

During the month of October, NGS hopes to inspire more people to preserve and share their family history. NGS has created downloadable PDFs with tips and suggestions on how to record loved ones, label and scan photos, and write a family story. Visit the NGS website to get these items for yourself, share them with a friend or family member, or use them with your genealogy organization for outreach and engagement.

Whether you record, scan, or write, take a few minutes to capture a short story or save images that may be valuable to your family now and for generations to come. Don't wait to go through old

photos or record an older relative. October is a great time to choose an activity and invite others to join you in celebrating, preserving, and sharing your family history.



Download the Family History Month resources at <https://www.ngsgenealogy.org/family-history-month> and share the joy of genealogy and family history in October. 

## Contributions to NGS Exceed Goal



Thanks to the generosity of our members and friends, contributions to the National Genealogical Society's 120th Anniversary campaign exceeded our \$14,400 goal

(\$120 from 120 members) by more than 25 percent. We raised \$18,384.39 and will be planting two hundred trees in honor of genealogists and ancestors. Donors' names will be listed in the April–June 2024 issue of *NGS Magazine*. 

## NGS's Culture Conversations

Culture Conversations discuss the nexus of history, culture, and genealogy, by focusing on thought-provoking and compelling books, films, and media through meaningful dialogue with fellow genealogists and family historians.

On 27 September, the National Genealogical Society's debut Culture Conversations event was held via Zoom. Featuring story strategist and documentary filmmaker Leonard Smith III, this engaging evening revolved around his latest project, *A Place Called Desire*. Leonard's passion for history and storytelling has led him to create award-winning documentaries that captivate hearts and minds. This discussion delved into his powerful film, exploring the transformative decades of the 60s and 70s in New Orleans.

Alicia Hawkins will join us as the guest speaker for our next Culture Conversations event, on 8 November, aligning with Native American Heritage

Month. Alicia is an award-winning documentary filmmaker known for her remarkable work, *American Red and Black: Stories of Afro-Native Identity* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPLgbgl4q8E>). Her film explores the experiences of individuals who identify as both Native American and African American, shedding light on the complexities of their unique identities.

Alicia's dedication to her craft and her commitment to telling stories that often go unheard have led to her work receiving praise as one of the "10 Fascinating Documentaries about Native Americans You Can Watch Right Now" (Indian Country Today) and a "must-see Native American documentary" (Sundance TV).

To learn more about Alicia, visit <https://www.aliciafilm.com>. Register for the 8 November Zoom event at <https://bit.ly/NGSCultureConvo8Nov2023>. 

## Deadline for NGS 2024 Awards and Competitions

Each year the National Genealogical Society recognizes excellence in the field of genealogy by presenting awards. All awards and competitions listed below are open to NGS individual and organizational members. The website, <https://www.ngsgenealogy.org/awards-competitions>, has full descriptions. The deadline for award nominations and competition submissions is 15 December 2023.

### Awards

**Rabbi Malcolm H. Stern Lifetime Achievement Award:** positive influence and leadership that have fostered unity and helped make family history a vital force in the community

**Lou D. Szucs Distinguished Service Award:** exemplary contributions to the National Genealogical Society

**Award of Merit:** contributions (over a period of years) significantly aiding research, education, or an increased interest in genealogy

**Shirley Wilcox Volunteerism Award:** generosity of spirit and time that has greatly benefited NGS, its members, or the genealogical community

**Genealogical Tourism Award:** promotional

efforts of repositories (libraries, archives, research sites) as “go to” destinations

### Competitions

**Family History Writing Contest** participants submit a family history covering three to four generations.

**Awards for Excellence** are presented to authors of books and articles that foster scholarship and excellence in genealogical research and writing.

- Genealogy or Family History Book (published during the past three years)
- Genealogical Methods and Sources (published during the past three years)
- NGSQ (selected by editors/staff from the previous year’s issues)

The NGS Newsletter Competition recognizes the hard work, long hours, and creativity that volunteer editors devote to their newsletters. Winners within the last four years may not submit entries in 2022.

The Rubincam Youth Writing Competition encourages our youth as the next generation of family historians, in two categories: Senior (grades 9–12) and Junior (grades 6–8). 

## NGS Helps Members Learn About Using Artificial Intelligence for Genealogy

There has been much in the news recently about artificial intelligence (AI) and the new consumer AI programs. In the genealogical community, there have been blog posts, podcasts, and presentations demonstrating the possibilities and warning about the limitations.

On 6 September, NGS hosted a MemberConnects! online event to help members learn about using artificial intelligence for genealogy. Presented by Steve Little, the program drew more than four hundred participants. The objective was to help members understand the power of AI, its limits, and how it can be harnessed for genealogy purposes. The NGS MemberConnects! program is now available to watch for free on the NGS YouTube page at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=npQaRJbzE1s>.

Current AI tools do not yet produce consistently reliable research results as they are based on language, not facts, and are prone to “hallucinations” where fictitious but convincing information is returned. AI engines are excellent for working with text provided by the user, such as summarizing, extracting data, cleaning up OCR text, and many other tasks to assist genealogists in research.

Instructor Steve Little has performed master's-level work in applied linguistics, which is the basis of AI's large language models. His lifelong interests in language, technology, and genealogy provide him with a unique vantage point at the intersection of these domains and prepare him to explain the use of this technology to others.

To learn more about using ChatGPT and preparing prompts to request the AI program, see Steve Little's blog post, "Crafting a Genealogy Prompt for ChatGPT: Five Valuable Components," at <https://aigenealogyinsights.com/2023/09/05/crafting-a-genealogy-prompt-for-chatgpt-five-valuable-components>.

### New courses: Empowering Genealogists with Artificial Intelligence

To further assist genealogists in learning to harness the power of AI for genealogy, NGS is now offering courses on Empowering Genealogists with Artificial Intelligence. Participants will learn how to leverage AI tools like ChatGPT, Bard, and Claude with step-by-step guidance on creating effective prompts to analyze data and assisting in many of the tasks accompanying genealogical research. Participants will also learn how to avoid common pitfalls, including how to handle working with private information on living individuals or DNA.



The course takes place over four weeks. Each week, participants join an engaging ninety-minute class to delve into the history, applications, benefits, limitations, and future possibilities of using AI for genealogy. There is time each week for Q&A and discussing the hands-on homework assignments. Participants need to have a subscription to ChatGPT Plus, which provides access to advanced features of the program and costs \$20 per month.

The first sections of the Empowering Genealogists with Artificial Intelligence course sold out in September, so NGS is offering an asynchronous course where participants watch the videos on their own time and then gather online in a Zoom session for Q&A with Steve. The Q&A sessions will also be recorded, and participants have eight weeks to view all of the sessions. NGS is also adding additional sections of the live weekly version of the course to begin in January. To learn more and to add your name to the waiting list for future courses, see <https://www.ngsgenealogy.org/ai>. 

## Delegates Recommend Organizational Dues Increase and Learn about Partnerships

The Delegate Council met in person in Richmond, Virginia, on 31 May leading into the NGS 2023 Family History Conference. With the theme of Taking the 3Cs to the Next Level, delegates had time to connect with each other, learn about the Records Preservation & Access Coalition, and get updated on work with PBS programming and the new Family Matters Community Outreach Program and Toolkit with Vivid-Pix. In addition, they got exciting partnership news as the first to hear that The Family History Guide Association will be offering resources to organizations and ConferenceKeeper.org is merging with NGS.

For the first time, delegates voted on recommendations to the NGS Board of Directors.

Delegates who could not attend in person were given the opportunity to submit proxy votes online. The first item passed with 88 percent in favor of recommending the Board increase dues from \$50 to \$75 for small organizations and from \$100 to \$150 for large organizations (as part of the new fiscal year budget effective 1 October 2023). The second item passed with 95 percent in favor of establishing a task force to work on a new program to recognize member organizations operating with excellence.

Email Organizations and Communities Manager Kate Smith at [ksmith@ngsgenealogy.org](mailto:ksmith@ngsgenealogy.org) with any questions. 

## NGS 2024 Family History Conference

The National Genealogical Society's 2024 Family History Conference will take place virtually on 16-18 May. The theme, Expanding Possibilities, reflects the conference's focus on innovation and finding new ways to solve problems.

FOCUS sessions on Thursday, 16 May, will address topics of interest to genealogical society and reference services leaders. Pre-conference in-depth genealogy workshops are also being planned for 16 May.

The main conference on 17-18 May will present more than forty lectures on genealogy topics at all levels. The conference will feature the leading family history lecturers and will continue to be the premier

genealogical education opportunity in the United States and beyond.

The Board for Certification of Genealogists (BCG) will sponsor the BCG Skillbuilding track of lectures. On 18 May, James Dent Walker Series of lectures on African American genealogy will take place. Registration for the main conference entitles attendees to not just the lectures with live Q&A on 17-18 May but access to all forty-plus lectures on demand. Throughout the conference, there will be exhibitor live streams, meetups, and hosted events.

The NGS 2024 Family History conference will again present the best of the best genealogical speakers and vendors, now in a virtual format available to all. 🌱

## Missed the NGS Annual Meeting? Watch It on YouTube!

This year's National Genealogical Society Annual Meeting was held on 16 August 2023. President Kathryn Doyle opened the one-hour meeting and introduced Vice President Ellen Balthazar, who explained how NGS used fiscal year 2023 to regroup and stabilize and set a goal to "come back stronger." Highlights included:

- Cheri Passey's update on how organizations' voices are being heard at NGS
- Lisa Fanning's report (presented by Ellen Balthazar) on key member benefits and new opportunities for member collaboration
- Andre Kearns's summary of how NGS is measuring and tracking its Diversity, Equity, and

### Inclusion (DEI) progress

- Angela McGhie's overview of the newest NGS education course, Advanced Skills in Genealogy, and announcement of an upcoming series, Artificial Intelligence for Genealogists
- David Rencher's explanation of the importance of the Bounty Land Warrant Application Files 1800-1900 and the launch of Phase II of the Preserve the Pensions Project—the conservation and digitization of the Veteran Bounty Land Records
- Doug Klein's presentation on NGS financials

If you missed the annual meeting, you can view it on the NGS YouTube channel at <https://bit.ly/NGS2023AnnualMeeting>. 🌱

## Nominations Sought for the National Genealogy Hall of Fame

The National Genealogical Society and the National Genealogy Hall of Fame are seeking nominations from genealogical societies and historical societies for persons whose achievements have made an impact on the field. One person is elected to the Hall of Fame annually. Those elected are permanently commemorated in the virtual Hall of Fame at <https://www.ngsgenealogy.org/hall-of-fame-members>.

A nominee must have been

actively engaged in genealogy in the United States for at least ten years, must have been deceased for at least five years at the time of nomination, and must have made contributions to the field of genealogy judged to be of lasting significance. Affiliation with the National Genealogical Society is not required.

The deadline for submissions is 15 December 2023.

The nomination form is available at <https://www.ngsgenealogy.org/hall-of-fame>. 🌱



# People Are More Than Names: Techniques for Differentiating Identities

Shannon Green, CG

When family historians assume records apply to one person based only on the same name, they may incorrectly conflate or combine the identities of multiple people. Other genealogists may neglect to prove that an individual in one location is the same as a person in another area, resulting in missed opportunities for research.

These situations highlight the two most common identity issues: people of the same name whose identities need to be separated and those appearing to be different people whose identities need to be merged. The same skills required to distinguish different identities can help merge identities. Researchers can differentiate people by using the concept of identity characteristics.

This article defines identity characteristics, explains three techniques for differentiating identities, and demonstrates these techniques in case studies.

## Why does identity matter?

Each person has a unique identity that can be documented based on individual experiences and family relations. For example, there was only one John Smith who married Mary Jones on 6 March 1850 in Kent County, Delaware.<sup>1</sup> Identity matters because accuracy matters.

Accuracy is fundamental to genealogical research. Without it, a family's history would be fiction.<sup>2</sup>

When someone's identity is unclear, there is a greater risk of making mistakes in tracing the person's life, family, and story.

Websites cited in this article were viewed on 19 July 2023.

1. Delaware, marriages 90:8, Smith-Jones, 16 March 1850; *FamilySearch* digital film 5099508, image 17.
2. Board for Certification of Genealogists, *Genealogy Standards*, 2nd ed. rev. (Nashville, TN: 2021), xix.

Smith John, furnisher, Crerar, Adams & Co. r. 22 Hubbard
Smith John, carpenter, Fox & Howard
Smith John, carpenter, r. 40 Oakwood
Smith John, carpenter, bds. 97 Clinton
Smith John, carpenter, r. 140 W. Monroe
Smith John, carpenter, bds. 207 N. Clark
Smith John, carpenter, r. 785 N. Halsted
Smith John, caulkier, Doolittle & Bates, r. 43 Mitchell
Smith John, cigarmkr. r. 134 McGregor
Smith John, clk. bds. 163 Wells
Smith John, clk. bds. 278 Sedgwick
Smith John, cooper, r. 103 Main
Smith John, cooper, r. 198 Michigan
Smith John, cooper, r. 78 White
Smith John, dairyman, r. 379 Carroll
Smith John, drayman, r. 294 Division
Smith John, driver, N. C. C. R. W. Co.
Smith John, driver, U. S. Ex. Co. r. N. Franklin
Smith John, fireman, I. C. yards
Smith John, framemkr. r. 116 Catherine
Smith John, horseshoer, r. 179 State
Smith John, lab. C. & N. W. R. W. (Wis. Div.)
Smith John, lab. r. 45 Ruble
Smith John, lab. r. 63 Menomonee
Smith John, lab. r. 89 W. Chicago av.
Smith John, lab. r. 137 W. Liberty
Smith John, lab. bds. 139 N. Desplaines
Smith John, lab. r. rear 355 State
Smith John, lab. r. 463 4th
Smith John, lab. r. 591 Milwaukee av.
Smith John, marblecutter, r. 218 Monroe
Smith John, mason, r. 727 S. May
Smith John, metalspinner, Chicago Mfg. Co.
Smith John, moulder, Western Star Metal Co.
Smith John, moulder, bds. 157 S. Jefferson
Smith John, moulder, Western Star Metal Co.
Smith John, pianomover, r. 353 S. May
Smith John, plasterer, r. al. bet. Ohio and Indiana, Kingsbury and Market
Smith John, porter, r. 54 Arnold
Smith John (col'd), roomtender, bds. 324 Clark
Smith John, sailor, bds. 17 Dunn
Smith John, sailor, r. 397 Erie
Smith John, sailor, r. 531 Larrabee
Smith John, saloon, 493 Clark, r. same
Smith John, saloon, Chicago av. nw. cor. Carpenter
Smith John, shoemaker, H. Schroder, r. 22 Oakwood

Entries for John Smith in Udall & Hopkins' Chicago City Directory, for 1852 & '53 (*Chicago: Udall & Hopkins, 1852*), 169 (Fold3)

**Shannon Green**, CG, is a genealogy researcher, writer, and educator. She earned the Certified Genealogist credential in 2017 and renewed her credential in 2022. Shannon serves as a trustee for the Board for Certification of Genealogists and as a trustee for the BCG Education Fund and is a former instructor for Boston University's Genealogy Principles course. Shannon lives in Greenwood Village, Colorado, with her husband and three children.

How can a genealogist be sure that a record pertains to the correct person? Aside from the name-is-the-same, there must be a valid reason to associate records with a particular individual.

Many researchers have made the error of conflating same-named people. Days, weeks, and even years can be spent tracing the genealogy of the wrong person who happened to have the same name as the subject, which results in researchers having to cut off entire branches of their family tree when they eventually discover their mistake. On the other hand, the inability to see the parallels in the identity of two people in different locations (or in the same place with different names) could result in brick walls blocking progress.

A name alone is not a reliable indicator of identity. Names that sound unusual to a modern ear might not have been unique historically. For example, five men named Preserved Fish were enumerated in 1800.<sup>3</sup> Cultural naming conventions might result in many people with the same name in a single location. In Ireland, more than half of all people born in the 1800s had one of twelve given names.<sup>4</sup> Historically, women changed their names upon marriage. Amy Smith, born in the 1600s in Connecticut, married three times and therefore had four names throughout her life.<sup>5</sup> Many immigrants Americanized their names upon arrival in the United States.

## Identity characteristics defined

Genealogists can use identity characteristics, also called identity markers, to distinguish one person from another. The most common identity characteristic is a name, but many more aspects can help identify people uniquely in their time and place. Try to determine as many identity characteristics as possible for each person under study.

- **Names:** All parts of a name can fluctuate for one individual at different times. Record all names used throughout the person's lifetime. Sometimes people consistently used their middle initials to stand out from another person in the county with the same name.
- **Age or birthdate:** If one person is twenty years older than another with the same name, use the

age disparity to distinguish them. One could be noted as "Jr." and another as "Sr." This usage does not necessarily mean that "Sr." is the father of "Jr.;" historically, these suffixes reflect relative age rather than relationship. Try to approximate ages if not known, based on life events, to place people in the appropriate generations for differentiation.

- **Family members and associates:** People interact repeatedly with the same individuals, whether kin or neighbors. Track the family members and associates to distinguish people from others.
- **Geography:** Pinpoint residences and the periods of time for each, as precisely as possible, since simultaneous events for a person of the same name in different places usually indicate more than one individual. Note land descriptions and waterways. Try platting them, if possible, to see the person in the context of the neighborhood.
- **Occupation:** If one man was a farmer and another was a cooper, use his occupation as an identifier. Many records note occupations, such as censuses and deeds.
- **Economic status:** Tax assessments and land ownership might reflect relative wealth as a factor for comparison.
- **DNA:** This is the identity characteristic that most uniquely identifies a person.
- Any other factors that set the person apart. Some identity characteristics are listed in table 1. This list is not exhaustive, and not all of these markers apply to all research problems. The combination of identity characteristics and life events is what makes each person uniquely

Name: nicknames, middle name, initial
Title or post-nominal
Dates and locations of vital events
Signature
Occupation
Physical description
Literacy
Military service
DNA
Family composition
FAN club names, places, and dates
Religion and church membership
Economic status
Property ownership
Residence
Citizenship status
Immigration date
Ethnicity

Table 1. Examples of identity characteristics

3. "1800 United States Federal Census," *Ancestry* (<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/7590>). Search for "Preserved Fish."

4. David S. Ouimette, *Finding Your Irish Ancestors: A Beginner's Guide* (Provo, UT: Ancestry Publishing, 2005), 18.

5. Thomas Painter, *Autobiography of Thomas Painter, Relating His Experiences during the War of the Revolution* (printed privately, 1910), 8.

identifiable and traceable, among others of the same name and among shifting names and circumstances for the same person.

Track the identity characteristics of the research subject in a word-processing document, genealogy software, or hard copy files while collecting records. These identity characteristics were noted for a man in the 1850 census:<sup>6</sup>

- name: William Hawkins
- age: 23
- birth location: New York
- occupation: Cooper
- presumed wife: Margaret, age 19, born in New Jersey
- inferred child: Richard, age 10/12, born in New Jersey
- residence: Newark, New Jersey
- associates: Harriet S. Hudson, age 4, lived in the household; shared dwelling with Lorinda King and family

Multiple techniques can be used to help understand a person's identity. The following three strategies move from simple to more complex.

### **Technique #1: Census comparison**

Compare census records over an individual's lifetime to see if they pertain to the same person, as shown in table 2.

John Wedge lived with his family in Cologne, Mason County, West Virginia, in 1900, 1910, and 1920. His birth year is consistently calculated to be about 1858. His wife is named "Rosa J." in each census. John had at least ten children. Most children appeared in his household in multiple enumerations and aged approximately ten years between censuses. Identity characteristics such as birth year, spouse's name, residence, and family composition, not just his name, suggest that these records apply to the same man.

Just as a census comparison can indicate one person over a lifetime, in other cases it can highlight a conflict. Table 3 compares four censuses for John or Jonathan Easterling in Barnwell District, South Carolina. In these pre-1850 census records, only the

### **CENSUS COMPARISON**

Census Year:	1900 <sup>a</sup>		1910 <sup>b</sup>		1920 <sup>c</sup>	
State:	WV		WV		WV	
County:	Mason		Mason		Mason	
Town:	Cologne		Cologne		Cologne	
	Name	Age	Name	Age	Name	Age
	John Wedge	42	John I. Wedge	52	John I. Wedge	62
	Rosa J. "	32	Rosa J. "	42	Rosa J. "	52
	Dorsel "	13	Dorsel "	23		
	Mearla "	12				
	Cecil "	10	Cecil "	20		
	Nannie "	8	Nonnie "	17		
	Syble "	5	Sybel "	15		
	John L. "	3	John "	13	John L. "	22
	Icycl "	9/12	Icycl "	10		
			Joseph "	8	Joseph I. "	17
			Zerna "	5	Zernie "	14
					Roscoe "	9

a. 1900 US census, Mason Co., WV, population schedule, Cologne, p. 80 (stamped), enumeration district (ED) 52, dwelling 242, family 245, John Wedge household.

b. 1910 US census, Mason Co., WV, pop. sch., Cologne, ED 102, sheet 1B, dwell. 8, fam. 8, John I. Wedge household.

c. 1920 US census, Mason Co., WV, pop. sch., Cologne, ED 80, sheet 2A, dwell. 21, fam. 21, John I. Wedge household.

*Table 2. Census comparison for a single identity: John Wedge. Citations have been removed from the remaining tables.*

head of household is listed. Therefore, the names of spouses and children cannot be used as identity characteristics. The age of the head of household is consistent across the four census records. However, his first name is "John" in 1810 and 1820, and "Jonathan" in 1830 and 1840. John could be a nickname for Jonathan, but that can't be assumed. John was not an enslaver in 1810 and 1820, while Jonathan was in 1830 and 1840. The changes in name and economic status suggest that these records could apply to two different men. A census comparison that reveals conflicts could be a warning that multiple people with the same name have been accidentally merged.

### **Technique #2: Timeline**

Another technique to sort identities is to create a timeline to see if the dates and places of events are

6. 1850 US census, Essex Co., New Jersey, population schedule, Newark North Ward, p. 39B (stamped), dwelling 407, family 610, William Hawkins household.

consistent with one person or multiple people. Include anything in the timeline with associated dates, such as vital events, children's births, census records, military draft registrations, or naturalizations. Capture information such as location, name variations, and other people mentioned in the record.

Arrange the events chronologically, and consider the person's age at the time. For example, is a fifty-seven-year-old woman giving birth or a thirteen-year-old boy getting married? Review locations and determine if they are consistent with one person or two. Is a man buying land in South Carolina at the same time he is serving in the Civil War from New York? Recognize patterns of associates, such as John Fitzgerald's neighbor Patrick O'Grady identified in a deed and then appointed by John as his executor two years later. These are all situations where a timeline can highlight potential identity consistencies or conflicts. Consistency of identity characteristics indicates that the events pertain to one person; conflicts suggest

## CENSUS COMPARISON WITH CONFLICTS

	1810	1820	1830	1840
	Barnwell, SC	Barnwell, SC	Barnwell, SC	Barnwell, SC
Head of household	John Easterling male 26-44	John Easterling male 26-44	Jonathan Easterling male 50-59	Jonathan Easterling male 60-69
Oldest female	female 16-25	female 26-44	female 40-49	female 60-69
Other males	2 males under 10	1 male 16-25	1 male 15-19	1 male 20-29
		3 males under 10	3 males 10-14	1 male 5-9
Other females	2 females under 10	1 female 10-15		2 females 15-19
		1 female under 10		
Enslaved			9 enslaved	16 enslaved

Table 3. Census comparison that raises questions: John/Jonathan Easterling

they relate to multiple people.

Table 4, a timeline for Alta Jane, suggests that the records pertain to the same person. Despite the various locations, her husband's name and the names of some of her children are consistent between records. Although she died in Iowa, she was buried in Minnesota, consistent with the location in her son's military record. Including her children's birth and marriage records would make the timeline more extensive. These additional details may be helpful if trying to determine which children were associated with multiple spouses, for example.

## TIMELINE

Year	Name	Record Type	Location	Information
1857	Alta Jane Darst	Birth Record	Mason Co., VA	Born 29 Jun 1857, female, daughter of David Darst, farmer, and Celesta E.
1883	Alta Durst	Marriage Record	Mason Co., WV	Frank Wilcoxon and Alta Durst of Mason Co., WV, married 18 Nov 1883 at home of Mr. David Durst
1895	Alta Jane Wilcoxon	Church Record	Baden, Mason Co., WV	Benj. Franklin and Alta Jane Wilcoxon baptized on 10 Oct 1895 with their children: Clyde Welby, James Raymond, Sheridan Parker, Hoyt Edgar, Harry Blackburn, Cynthia Elizabeth, and John Royal.
1913	Alta Durst	Marriage Record	Cherokee Co., IA	Daughter Cynthia Wilcoxon married Cecil Wedge. Bride born Mason Co., WV, parents B. F. Wilcoxon and Alta Durst.
1918	Alta Wilcoxon	Military Record	Slayton, Murray Co., MN	Military record database entry for Harry Blackburn Wilcoxon, born 9 Dec 1891 in Baden, WV, child of BF and Alta Wilcoxon. Resided in Slayton, MN.
1927	Alta Jane Wilcoxon	Death Record	Cedar, Cherokee Co., IA	Died 27 Feb 1927, age 69, father David Durst, mother Blackburn, spouse BF Wilcoxon, buried in Slayton, MN.
1927	Alta Jane Durst Wilcoxon	Cemetery	Slayton, Murray Co., MN	Born 29 Jun 1857, died 27 Feb 1927, husband Benjamin Franklin Wilcoxon, parents David Durst and Elizabeth Celeste Blackburn; children Harry Blackburn Wilcoxon, Anna Mabel Wilcoxon Dayton.

Table 4. Timeline for a single identity: Alta Jane

Sometimes a timeline might indicate that identities should be merged. For example, a subject might disappear from one location and appear in a new place around the same time. Or a subject might stop using one name and begin using another. Both cases may be solved by reviewing the subject's identity characteristics and creating a timeline to ensure the records fit together for one person rather than overlapping.

Table 5 shows the use of a timeline and identity characteristics to help merge identities. In this case, Mark Parmalee bought and sold properties in multiple locations. The timeline demonstrates that he was buying and selling property in only one location at a time.

There must always be a reason to connect two records together in support of a single identity. Levi Parmalee's civil birth record in Guilford names Mark as his father. Decades later in Litchfield, Mark gave his son Levi land for love and affection. Having a son named Levi is one of Mark's identity characteristics, consistent in both locations. Similarly, Mark sold Demetrius Crampton property in Litchfield and almost twenty years later sold him land in Clarendon.

Mark's son Timothy was baptized in Litchfield and Mark quitclaimed him land in Clarendon. Recognizing the same people as associates in multiple locations allows the researcher to connect the records. When Mark purchased land initially in Litchfield he was "of Guilford," further connecting the records.

All three timelines pertain to the same man, with no conflicts, and the identities can be merged.

### **Technique #3: Gather, connect, and sort identities**

If the census comparison and timeline suggest multiple same-named people, distinguishing different identities might require a more complex method. The following technique can be applied to various same-named people or as part of a surname study to sort out families with the same surname. This process has two steps:

1. Gather as many records as possible that name the subject.
2. Connect and sort the records based on identity characteristics.

#### **Gather records**

Determine what records are available in the

#### **TIMELINE THAT SUGGESTS MERGING IDENTITIES**

Year	Mark Parmalee Guilford, CT	Mark Parmalee Litchfield, CT, and Washington, CT	Mark Parmalee Clarendon, VT
1721	Mark was born.		
1753	Son Levi was born.		
1742-1765	Bought and sold various properties, in last transaction selling the "house where I now live."	Mark "of Guilford" purchased property.	
1769		Son Timothy was baptized.	
1767-1772		Bought and sold various properties, including selling to Demetrius Crampton.	
1776		Sold land to son Levi for love and affection.	
1779		Washington, CT, carved from Litchfield and other towns.	
1784-1788		Sold various properties.	Bought property.
1790			Enumerated in 1790 census and sold property to Demetrius Crampton.
1792			Bought and sold property.
1795			Quitclaimed remaining property to son Timothy.

*Table 5. Timelines for merging identities. Comparing the timelines for three Mark Parmalees in three different locations indicates that the identities can be merged. Besides each Mark being active in only one location at a time, named associates connect the men.*

location and timeframe for the subject. Find records that name the subject and note other identifying characteristics such as a spouse's name, children, waterways, literacy, neighbors, and witnesses. Put this information in a format that can be sorted—index cards, a word-processing document, an Evernote or Airtable template, or a spreadsheet.

For example, the census comparison for John and Jonathan Easterling suggests they were different men. To evaluate this possibility more thoroughly, the following types of records were gathered between 1800 and 1850 in Barnwell District, South Carolina, for all Easterlings: census, probate, court indexes, plats, deeds, tax, and cemetery records. This is not an exhaustive list of available records, but it can provide enough information to start sorting people into family groups.

For each record or index entry found, note the year, type of record, given name, citation, and any potentially identifying information. Table 6 is a small section of the spreadsheet created for the Easterling surname.

### Connect and sort the records

Try to connect one record with another by using identity characteristics as shown in the Mark Parmalee case study. Then try another. Sort them into groups. Highlighting in color and assigning informal labels (such as Mark of Guilford) might make connections and identities more visible.

In the Easterling example, it was possible to connect and sort the gathered records into two family groups based on shared identity characteristics such as waterways, family members, and associates. Connections within these groups indicate that there was one man named John Easterling and one man named Jonathan Easterling in Barnwell District in the first half of the nineteenth century.

### Easterling family group 1: Jonathan, William T., Howell, Ann

- Jonathan's neighbors in 1810 included Zeigler and Hickman. Hickman is listed as a neighbor in an 1811 deed for land around the Edisto River. He sold land on Ball Gall Branch to Jonathan. Zeigler was an appraiser of Jonathan's estate in 1846 and a neighbor of William T. Easterling in 1850. These records connect Jonathan to William T. Easterling, Zeigler, and Hickman.

- Howell purchased enslaved persons from Jonathan's estate and land on Ball Gall Branch, the same waterway where Jonathan purchased land previously.
- Jonathan's widow was Ann, who lived next to Howell Easterling in 1850.

### Easterling family group 2: Joel, Bennet, Henry, John

- Joel's 1802 plat identifies his land by Crages [Craigs] Pond Branch of Big Saltcatchers River.
- Bennet's 1804 deed lists Joel as a neighbor as well as the location of Craigs Pond Branch. The common location of Craigs Pond Branch connects Bennet to Joel. Henry witnessed the deed, which ties him to Joel and Bennet.
- An 1806 plat for land between Great Saltcatcher River and Turkey Creek lists Henry Easterling and Marmaduke Gardner as neighbors. Gardner was a neighbor of John Easterling in 1806 and 1810. This record connects John to Henry.

These are just a few of the connections that led to establishing two family groups. This type of correlation highlights connections between people which helps to distinguish identities. Additional targeted research can be conducted after gathering and sorting the initial records. For example, studying extant church records and exploring more recent generations can flesh out the Easterling identities more completely.

### Conclusion

Focusing on identity characteristics beyond names can help separate, sort, and merge identities, a common concern for genealogists. Rather than using only a name to connect one record to another, use multiple identity characteristics to fully describe the subject as a unique person. The techniques outlined here can help solve the problem of distinguishing same-named individuals and merging different information for the same person. 

### Resources

#### Case studies:

Green, Shannon. "Two Probates and Three Richards: Who Was Richard Bedell of Hempstead, Queens County, New York?" *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 107 (December 2019): 259-270; <https://www.greenwichgenealogy.com/publications>.

King, Ricki. "Separating the Identities of Two

## GATHER, CONNECT, AND SORT

Year	Type of record	Which one?	Notes
1802	Plat	Joel	Easterling, Joel, Plat for 400 Acres on Crages [Craigs] Pond Branch of Big Saltcatchers River, Barnwell District; names mentioned: Collins, Christopher; Coward, Ezekiel; Easterling, Joel; Miner, William.
1804	Deed	Bennet	271a by George Aaron; lower part of grant to Wm Sumerall that was 543a; neighbors Samuel Lee, Joel Easterling, Craigs Pond Branch; wit. Henry Easterling, Willis Deer.
1806	Plat	John	Plat for 728 Acres between Great Saltcatchers River and Turkey Creek, Barnwell District. Neighbors: David Cave, M.duke Guardian, Morris Sanders, Mr. Lee, Wm Dossett.
1806	Plat	Henry	Holder, John and Rolling Hutson, Plat for 603 Acres between Great Saltcatcher River and Turkey Creek, Barnwell District. Easterling, Henry; Gardner, Marmaduke; Holder, John; Hutson, Rolling; Kirkland, James; O'Bannon, Thomas.
1810	Census	Jonathan	Age 26-44 (born 1766-1784), headed a household with 10 people. It appears to be a husband and wife, 8 children ages 0-15, and 2 enslaved people. Neighbors: John Hickman Sr, John Hickman, Jr, John Miele, Abner Glover, William Berry, Thomas Hickman, Mary M Zeigler, Joseph Zeigler, Conrad Zeigler, and John Valentine.
1810	Deed	John	728a Turkey Creek; orig granted to JE in 1805; n. Wm Dosset, Marmaduke Gardner, David Cave, Moses Sanders, Sam. Lee; wit. Wm Bibb, Wm. Stackhouse.
1811	Deed	Jonathan	265a total: one tract of 100a originally granted to Peter Graham and other tract of 165a orig granted to El[?] Hickman; wit. Moses Tyler and John Tyler.
1815	Deed	Jonathan	100a Bill Gall Branch; wit. John Tyler, Jacob Hickman; part of 640a tract orig to John Hickman.
1839	Deed	Howell	100a Bill Gall Branch
1846	Probate	Jonathan Sr	Estate appraisers Milhouse, James Zeigler and Jos Zeigler. Jonathan Easterling (died before 10 Apr 1846) was the father of Jonathan and Howell Easterling. Ann Easterling was his widow. This is consistent with Ann showing up in census after Jonathan died. Another likely child is Wm T. Easterling.
1850	Census	Ann	Born about 1776, did not own any real estate and she lived next to H. Easterling. John McCormick, age 21, lived with her. Ann had 8 enslaved people.
1850	Census	W[illiam].T.	Born about 1820, was married to Martha. He owned \$2,000 in real estate. Children 2-7: Ann, John, Georgiana, Mary, and William. This is likely the same person as William Easterling who had 7 enslaved people and lived in town of America. Notice neighbor is Zeigler.

Table 6. Connecting gathered records in a spreadsheet to sort identities. After records were connected to each other, Easterling family groups were differentiated by light green and dark green.

Hattie Campbells of Marion and Ralls Counties, Missouri, Reveals Hattie King's Mother." *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 110 (December 2022): 265-273.

Lennon, Rachal Mills. "Southern Strategies: Merging Identities by Mapping Activities and Linking Participants—Solomon Harper of South Carolina's Lowcountry." *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 107 (September 2019): 165-184.

Russell, Judy. "George Washington Cottrell of Texas: One Man or Two?" *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 105 (September 2017): 165-179; <https://bcgcertification.org/learning/skills/genealogical-work-samples/#CS>.

### Issues and techniques:

Anderson, Robert Charles. "Linkage Analysis." Chap.

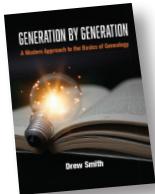
3 in *Elements of Genealogical Analysis*. Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2014.

Fonkert, J. H. "Genealogical Fingerprints: Merging and Separating Identities in Family History Research." 15 March 2016. *Legacy Family Tree Webinars*. <https://familytreewebinars.com>.

Rising, Marsha Hoffman. "Sorting Individuals with the Same Name." Chap. 9 in *The Family Tree Problem Solver: Tried-and-True Tactics for Tracing Elusive Ancestors*. Third ed. Cincinnati: Family Tree Books, 2019.

Stevenson, Noel C. "The Identity Problem." Chap. 2 in *Genealogical Evidence: A Guide to the Standard of Proof Relating to Pedigrees, Ancestry, Heirship and Family History*. Rev. ed. Laguna Hills, CA: Aegean Press, 1989.

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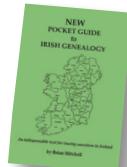


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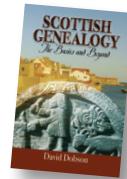
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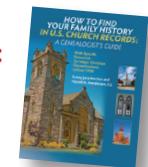
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# Names, Dates, and Places: The Foundations of Genealogical Research

Julia M. Bagwell, CG

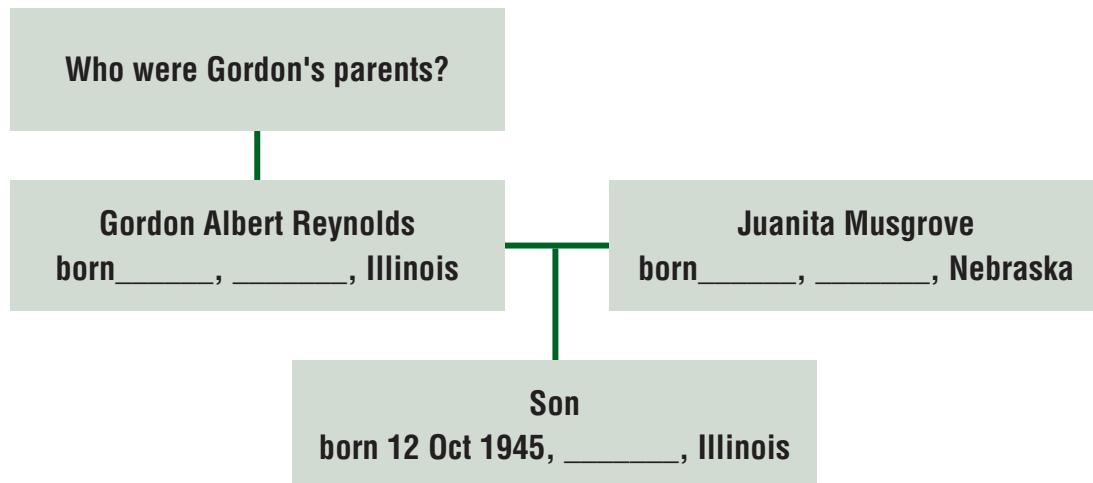


Figure 1. Begin with what is known

Without a name, date, and place, it is difficult if not impossible to distinguish one individual from others with the same name during research. This may seem like genealogical common sense, but all too often, only one or two of these basic characteristics of a person's unique identity are known at first. Sometimes the best option is to wait until the missing pieces are available. This article demonstrates the pitfalls of conducting research with incomplete identity characteristics and the surprising conclusion when new information makes them more precise.

Consider this research question: Who were the parents of Gordon Albert Reynolds, born in Illinois, who had a child with Juanita Musgrove, born in Nebraska?

Without dates and specific locations as anchors, research will be frustrating and unproductive. Should research begin in the 1800s or 1900s? Where in Illinois was Gordon born? How can he be differentiated from others with the same name?

## Initial information

All facts known about an individual should be reviewed before creating a research question. The only source available at the beginning of the research to determine correct parents was a 1974 marriage record for the son of Gordon Albert Reynolds, born in Illinois, and Juanita

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Musgrove, born in Nebraska, stating that their son was born on 12 October 1945 in Illinois.<sup>1</sup>

Gordon was probably at least eighteen when he fathered a child in 1945, so he was likely born before 1927. However, he could have been older and born much earlier.

Based on this information, the research question can be rephrased (with additions in italics) as: Who were the parents of Gordon Albert Reynolds, *born in Illinois probably before 1927*, who had a child *in 1945, in Illinois*, with Juanita Musgrove, born in Nebraska?

Research should begin with what is known in the 1940s and move backward through time to the unknown (figure 1). Records in this period that might supply evidence to answer the research question include census, vital, and military records.

## Initial research

Gordon and Juanita do not appear as a couple in the 1940 census for Illinois, Iowa, or Nebraska.<sup>2</sup> (The 1950 census was not available when research began.) The 1940 census for Illinois records five males named Gordon or Gordon A. Reynolds ranging in age from eleven to forty-nine.

1. Gordon A. Reynolds, born 1891, Illinois (married to Bernice E.), in Chicago
2. Gordon Reynolds, born 1903, Illinois (married to Bernadett), in Chicago
3. Gordan Reynolds, born 1920, Ohio (nephew of Barney Hacker), in DuPage County
4. Gordon A. Reynalds, born 1922, Illinois (son of Nelson R. Reynolds), in Chicago
5. Gordon Reynolds, born 1929, Illinois (son of James Reynolds), in Putnam County

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Websites cited in this article were viewed on 28 July 2023.

1. Santa Clara, California, Certificate of Registry of Marriage, Cert. No. 3654, Book 259: 204, Evans-Reynolds, 1974; Office of Santa Clara County, Clerk & Recorder, San Jose.
2. "1940 United States Federal Census," database with images, *Ancestry* (<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2442>). Searches in Illinois, Nebraska, and Iowa for Gordon A. Reynolds with wife Juanita supplied no results. Iowa was searched because it is between Illinois and Nebraska, the states of birth for Gordon and Juanita.
3. "Illinois, U.S., County Marriage Records, 1800-1940," search for Gordon Reynolds; database with images, *Ancestry* (<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/61370>). The only record is for Gordon A. Reynolds to Bernice E. Botts Monson, Boone, Ill., 1921. Due to the lack of a birth year for Gordon who had a child with Juanita in 1945, this marriage (twenty-four years earlier) cannot be definitively attributed to him. Regardless, the record does not show the marriage of Gordon and Juanita.
4. "Nebraska Marriages, 1855-1995," search for Gordon Reynolds; database, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1708654>). No results.
5. "Iowa, U.S., Marriage Records, 1880-1947," database with images, *Ancestry* (<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/8823>); Gordon A. Reynolds and Patricia Ulrich, 31 January 1941, Clinton County; citing Vol. 1 (Adair County-Clinton County) Iowa Department of Public Health, Iowa Marriage Records, 1880-1945.
6. "U.S., World War II Draft Cards Young Men, 1940-1947," database with images, *Ancestry* (<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2238>); Gordon Albert Reynolds, serial number 362, order number 11894, Local Draft Board 75, Chicago City, registration 16 February 1942.
7. 1940 US census, Cook County, Illinois, population schedule, Chicago, enumeration district (ED) 103-3145, p. 7B, household 205, Nelson R. Reynolds household.

Assuming his age is correct, the youngest can be ruled out since he would have been only sixteen in 1945. Any or none of the other four might be the correct Gordon; he could have lived in another state in 1940. Besides these entries, there are many others with spelling variations, initials, different middle names, and Albert as the first name.

No records have been found to confirm the marriage of Gordon and Juanita in Illinois<sup>3</sup> or Nebraska.<sup>4</sup> An Iowa record for the marriage of a Gordon A. Reynolds, twenty-two, on 31 January 1941, provides his birth place, Chicago, and indicates his approximate birth year, 1919. It also names his parents as Nelson R. Reynolds and Florence E. Smith.<sup>5</sup> However, the record shows a different wife: Patricia Ulrich, not Juanita.

When this Gordon Albert Reynolds registered for the draft in 1942,<sup>6</sup> he supplied his Chicago birth place and birth date, 13 April 1921 (figure 2). His naming of Nelson R. Reynolds as the person who would always know his address, rather than his wife Patricia, suggests but does not prove that their marriage had dissolved. In 1940, Nelson R. Reynolds, forty-three, lived in Chicago with his wife Florence E., forty-seven, and two sons, Donald S., twenty-two, and Gordon A., eighteen (birth about 1922), both born in Illinois.<sup>7</sup>

This household seems like a potential family for Gordon who had a child with Juanita in 1945. However, without identifying characteristics such as his birth year, there is no way to be sure that this Gordon was the same person reported as Nelson's son in 1940. As Robert C. Anderson states, "[There] must be a sound, explicit reason for saying that any

## COMPARING TWO MEN WITH THE SAME NAME

Record	Name	Approx. Birth Date, Place	Father	Mother
1945 Birth of Son with Juanita Musgrove	Gordon Albert Reynolds	? (Probably prior to 1927), Illinois	?	?
1940 Census	Gordon A. Reynolds	1922, Illinois	Nelson R. Reynolds	Florence E.
1941 Reynolds-Ulrich Marriage	Gordon A. Reynolds	1919, Chicago	Nelson R. Reynolds	Florence E. Smith
1942 WW II Draft Registration	Gordon Albert Reynolds	13 Apr 1921, Chicago	"Person who will always know your address": Nelson R. Reynolds	?

Table 1. Comparing Gordon Albert Reynolds, the 1945 father, with Gordon A[lbert] Reynolds, son of Nelson R. Reynolds

two individual records refer to the same person.”<sup>8</sup>

Table 1 demonstrates this issue. Nelson R. Reynolds is the connecting link for the Gordon in the 1940, 1941, and 1942 records, which appear to relate to the same man. But the similar name and state of birth in the records are not sufficient to assume that they relate to Gordon who had a son with Juanita in 1945. More distinctive identifying characteristics need to be pinpointed to anchor him as a unique individual in a specific time and place.<sup>9</sup>

What about DNA? As with any genealogical tool, DNA, specifically atDNA, is only useful when correct pedigrees can be compared and corroborated by using analyzed and evaluated evidence to determine the most recent common ancestors of matches. A descendant of Gordon Reynolds who fathered a son in 1945 does not have any atDNA matches at AncestryDNA that could suggest or confirm a potential Reynolds ancestral line.

### Plan of attack: wait

One strategy, uncomfortable and strange as it may seem, is to wait for more information to surface. Eventually, new sources did present themselves:

- AncestryDNA’s Ethnicity Inheritance feature, issued in 2022, which shows ethnicities inherited from each parent “even if they haven’t taken tests”<sup>10</sup>
- the 1950 census, released and indexed in 2022

### AncestryDNA’s Ethnicity Inheritance

AncestryDNA’s Ethnicity Inheritance provides a breakdown of a tester’s ethnicity in two halves, showing which proportions of ethnicity are inherited from the mother and which from the father. While this feature does not provide the names of the parents (DNA is beneficial only when combined with a paper trail), it can suggest whether a correct path is being followed. In this case, the Ethnicity Inheritance for a descendant of Gordon and Juanita indicates that paternal ancestors had Scottish, Norwegian, and Swedish/Danish ancestry only.<sup>11</sup>

### The 1950 census

The 1950 census for Wheeling, Cook County, Illinois, includes the family of Gordon A. Reynolds and his wife Juanita. Gordon was twenty-nine (born about 1921, in Illinois), Juanita F. was twenty-four (born about 1926, in Nebraska), and they had two children, a son born about 1946 and a daughter born about 1949. Gordon had been married once before, and the marriage had ended six and a half years earlier.<sup>12</sup>

Aside from his wife named Juanita and son born about 1946 (matching information in their son’s 1974 marriage record), what is significant in this record is Gordon’s age. With this new identifying characteristic, research can focus on Gordon Albert Reynolds, born about 1921 in Illinois, who lived in Cook County in 1950.

8. Robert Charles Anderson, *Elements of Genealogical Analysis* (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2014), xii.

9. “Brian Reynolds,” DNA matches, managed by author; AncestryDNA (<https://www.ancestry.com/dna>). Brian Reynolds is a descendant of Gordon Reynolds and Juanita Musgrove. Used with permission. YDNA is another DNA testing method that can assist with identifying a man’s paternal line. The Y chromosome is passed primarily unchanged from father to son to grandson and so forth. At the time this article was written, YDNA test results were not available.

10. “What Ethnicities Did You Inherit from Each Side of Your Family?,” blog, 17 October 22, Ancestry (<https://blogs.ancestry.com/cm/what-ethnicities-did-you-inherit-from-each-side-of-your-family>).

11. “Brian Reynolds,” Ethnicity Inheritance, AncestryDNA.

12. 1950 US census, Cook County, Illinois, pop. sched., Wheeling, ED 16-765, sheet 388, p. 38A (penned), household 393, Gordon A. Reynolds household. The marriage information comes from the additional sample questions that Gordon was asked. The abbreviation in column 12 does not clarify whether Gordon was widowed or divorced from his first wife.

## Revised research question and hypothesis

The research question can again be revised (with additions in italics) to: Who were the parents of Gordon Albert Reynolds, born in Illinois *about* 1921, who had a child in 1945, in Illinois, with Juanita Musgrove, born in Nebraska, *and lived near Chicago in 1950?*

A quick glance at the list of the five Gordons in the 1940 Illinois census reduces the possibilities to two (bearing in mind that the Gordon described in the research question might have lived elsewhere in 1940).

**Candidate 1: Gordon Reynolds born about 1920, nephew of Barney Hacker.** The 1930 census reports that he was born in Ohio, making it likely that this Gordon's place of birth in the 1940 census (also Ohio) was not an enumerator error. While Ohio does not rule him out, this birth state makes it less probable that he was the Illinois-born Gordon who married Juanita.

**Candidate 2: Gordon Reynolds, born about 1922, son of Nelson R. Reynolds.** Earlier research located records for this Gordon: son of Nelson R. Reynolds in 1940, husband of Patricia Ulrich in 1941 (son of Nelson R. Reynolds and Florence E. Smith), and registrant for the World War II draft in 1942. That record states he was born 13 April 1921 in Chicago and names Nelson R. Reynolds (see figure 2).

The discovery of a critical identifying characteristic for Gordon in the 1950 census, his 1921 birth year, leads to the formulation of a hypothesis that can be tested: Nelson R. Reynolds, born about 1897 in Pennsylvania, and Florence E. (Smith) Reynolds, born about 1893 in New York, could be the parents of Gordon A. Reynolds, born 13 April 1921 in Chicago, who had a child with Juanita Musgrove in 1945.

## Renewed research

The hypothesis results in two new research questions:

- Can a birth record be found for Gordon Albert Reynolds, born 13 April 1921 in Chicago, son of Nelson R. Reynolds and Florence E. Smith?
- Do either of his parents, or both, have Scottish, Norwegian, or Swedish/Danish ancestors?

No information for the sons of Nelson and Florence Reynolds, Gordon born in 1921 and Donald born about 1918, appears in two databases of Illinois birth abstracts for this period.<sup>13</sup> Either their births were not registered in civil records, or no children with these names and parents were born in Illinois in this period.

A yellowed, handwritten WWII Draft Registration Card for Gordon Albert Reynolds. The card includes fields for Serial Number (T 362), Name (First: GORDON, Middle: ALBERT, Last: REYNOLDS), Order Number (T 11894), Place of Residence (1723 MORSE Ave, Chicago, Cook, Ill.), Age in Years (20), Date of Birth (Apr - 13 - 21), Place of Birth (Chicago), Employer's Name (Dear, Roebrick & Co.), and Place of Employment (406 So. State St., Chicago, Cook, Ill.). The card also includes a signature and a handwritten note: "I affirm that I have verified above answers and that they are true." At the bottom, it says "D. S. Form 1 (Revised 1-1-42)" and "GPO 16-21630-2".

Figure 2. WWII Draft Registration Card for Gordon Albert Reynolds

In such situations, creative searches can break down brick walls. Searching for only the given name Gordon Albert with no surname produces the correct record.

Of the thirteen matches for Gordon Albert born in 1921 in Illinois, in Historical Records on FamilySearch,<sup>14</sup> only one was born 13 April 1921 in Chicago.<sup>15</sup> His mother is listed as Florence Emily Smith, consistent with his 1941 marriage record to

13. Searches for Gordon and Donald Reynolds in "Cook County, Illinois, U.S. Birth Certificates Index, 1871-1922," database, Ancestry (<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2545>), and "Illinois, Cook County, Birth Certificates, 1871-1949," database, FamilySearch (<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1462519>).

14. FamilySearch (<https://www.familysearch.org/search>), Search Historical Records > First Names: Gordon Albert [no surname], Birth: Illinois, 1921; Show Exact Search, click boxes for name and place, Search.

15. "Illinois, Cook County, Birth Certificates, 1871-1949," database, FamilySearch; Gordon Albert Peterson, certificate number 13613, birth 13 April 1921, Chicago.

Patricia calling his mother Florence E. However, his father was not Nelson Reynolds nor any other Reynolds; he was John Albert Peterson, born in Chicago in 1891. Gordon's surname at birth was Peterson.

"Donald" Smith Peterson was born 24 November 1917 in Chicago to Florence Smith and John Albert Peterson.<sup>16</sup> Don Smith Reynolds's World War II Draft registration card reports the same birth date and place, indicating that Donald Smith Peterson and Donald Smith Reynolds were the same person.<sup>17</sup> For his registration, Donald said that his father Nelson R. Reynolds would always know his address.

J[ohn] Albert Peterson, born about 1891, married Florence E. Smith, born about 1893, on 27 April 1916 in Chicago,<sup>18</sup> and died there on 28 November 1924, leaving his widow, Florence.<sup>19</sup> His parents were

reportedly born in Sweden.<sup>20</sup> This birth place supports AncestryDNA's Ethnicity Inheritance feature, which names Sweden as an ancestral ethnicity region for Gordon and Juanita's descendant.

Adding the new information to the comparison table makes the picture clearer (table 2).

The use of naming patterns in this family is worth noting. Gordon Reynolds's middle name, Albert, appears to come from his father, John Albert Peterson, and Donald Reynolds's middle name, Smith, from his mother, Florence E. Smith. These names help support the conclusion that this line of ascent is correct.

## Conclusion

Gordon Albert Reynolds, who had a son with Juanita F. Musgrove, was born 13 April 1921 in Chicago as Gordon Albert Peterson, the son of John Albert Peterson and Florence Emily Smith. The

## COMPARING IDENTITIES WITH SIMILAR CHARACTERISTICS

Record	Name	Approx. Birth Date, Place	Father	His Birth, Place	Mother	Her Birth, Place
1945 Birth of Son with Juanita Musgrove	Gordon Albert Reynolds	? (Probably prior to 1927), Illinois	?	?	?	?
1950 Census	Gordon A. Reynolds	1921, Illinois	?	?	?	?
1940 Census	Gordon A. Reynolds and Donald S. Reynolds	1922, Illinois, and 1918, Illinois	Nelson R. Reynolds	1897, PA	Florence E.	1893, NY
1941 Reynolds-Ulrich Marriage	Gordon A. Reynolds	1919, Chicago	Nelson R. Reynolds	-	Florence E. Smith	-
1942 WW II Draft Registration	Gordon Albert Reynolds	13 Apr 1921, Chicago	Nelson Reynolds, no relationship (Person who will always know address)	-	-	-
Birth	Gordon Albert Peterson	13 Apr 1921, Chicago	John Albert Peterson	1891, Chicago	Florence Emily Smith	1893, New York, NY
1942 WW II Draft Registration	Don Smith Reynolds	24 Nov 1917, Chicago	Nelson Reynolds, father (Person who will always know address)	-	-	-
Birth	Donald Smith Peterson	24 Nov 1917, Chicago	John Albert Peterson	1891, Chicago	Florence Smith	1893, New York, NY

Table 2. Summation table for Reynolds and Peterson records

16. "Illinois, Cook County, Birth Certificates, 1871-1949," database, *FamilySearch*; Donald Smith Peterson, certificate number 47723, birth 27 November 1917, Chicago.

17. "U.S., World War II Draft Cards Young Men, 1940-1947," database with images, *Ancestry*; Don Smith Reynolds, serial number 1336, order number 2981, LaPorte County Local Draft Board 1, Michigan City, Indiana, registration 16 October 1940.

18. "Illinois, Cook County Marriages, 1871-1968," database, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1463145>); J. Albert Peterson and Florence E. Smith, Certificate # 724544, 27 April 1916.

19. "Illinois, Cook County Deaths, 1871-1998," database, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1463134>), John Albert Peterson, 28 November 1924, entry number 29408; citing Cook County Courthouse, Chicago.

20. "Illinois Deaths and Stillbirths, 1916-1947," database, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1438856>), John Albert Peterson, 28 November 1924; father J. Albert Peterson, born Sweden, mother Agnes Peterson Peterson, born Sweden.

"sound, explicit reason" for stating that Gordon Albert Reynolds was Gordon Albert Peterson is clear. He was born on the same day, in the same place, to the same mother, and had the same brother. Even though the surnames in the records are different, they pertain to the same person.

After the death of her husband in 1924, Florence Smith Peterson raised her two sons by herself until she married Nelson Reynolds between 1930 and 1934. In 1930, she was still a widow.<sup>21</sup> In 1934, Nelson R. Reynolds claimed his dependents as "Florence Reynolds, nee Smith" and "minor children Donald Smith Reynolds, Gordon Albert Reynolds."<sup>22</sup>

## MERGING IDENTITIES

Name	Birth, Place	Mother, Birth, Place	Father, Birth, Place
Gordon Albert Reynolds	13 April 1921, Chicago, IL	Florence E. Smith, 1893, New York	Nelson R. Reynolds, 1897, Pennsylvania
Gordon Albert Peterson	13 April 1921, Chicago, IL	Florence Emily Smith, 1893, New York, NY	John Albert Peterson, 1891, Chicago, IL

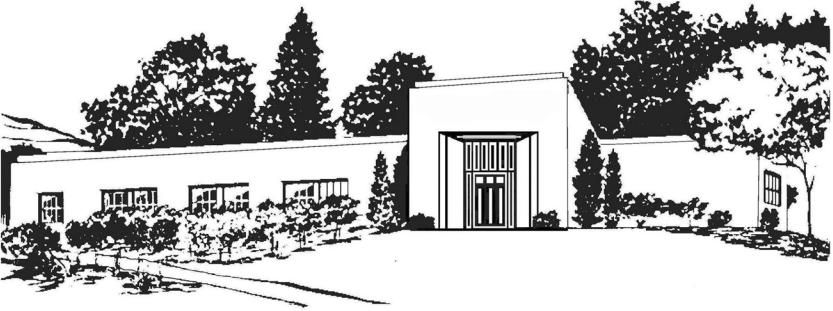
Table 3. Reynolds and Peterson: two surnames, one man

21. 1930 US census, Cook County, Illinois, pop. sched., Chicago, ED 1779, sheet 9B, dwelling 4522 to 4518, family 221, Florence Peterson household.

22. "Pennsylvania, U.S. World War I Veterans Service and Compensation Files, 1917-1919, 1934-1948," database with images, *Ancestry* (<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/60884>); Nelson Roy Reynolds, 13 February 1934, Veterans Compensation Application; citing World War I Veterans Service and Compensation File, 1934-1948, RG 19, Series 19.91; Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

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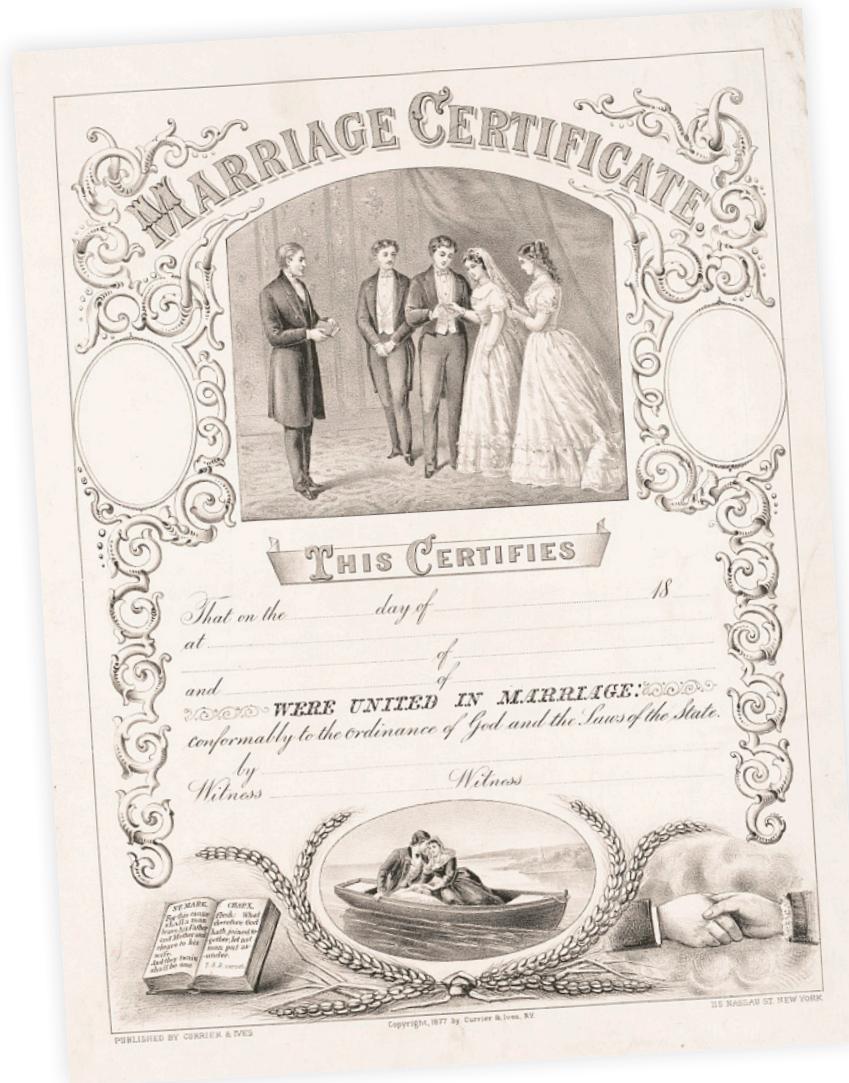
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# Finding the Elusive Maiden Name

Ann G. Lawthers, Sc.D



Blank marriage certificate, Currier & Ives, 1877 (Library of Congress)

Many family historians despair about finding their ancestress's maiden name. The American custom of wives adopting their husbands' surnames hides their pre-marriage identities. Without her maiden name, researchers can't identify a woman's parents or discover information about her life before marriage. If they are lucky, her given name is known, but often the ancestress is just Mrs. John Smith. Fortunately, there is a hierarchy of strategies for pursuing the maiden name.

**Ann G. Lawthers, Sc.D**, genealogist with the Brue Family Learning Center at American Ancestors / New England Historic Genealogical Society for many years, recently retired. She continues to teach on a wide range of genealogical topics with special areas of interest in colonial New England and mid-Atlantic research as well as migration patterns from all eras.

First, attempt to locate the marriage record, in any of its forms. Second, review other types of records that may contain the maiden name, such as her death records or her children's vital records. If the first two strategies fail to yield results, learn as much as possible about the husband. After all, the couple had to meet somewhere, and the geographic location of records generated by the husband's family may lead to records of the bride's family. Finally, family historians should immerse themselves in local history to understand the settlement and migration patterns of families, which might provide clues to a woman's origins.

## Find the marriage record

As always, work from the known to the unknown. In this case, the “known” is that a marriage took place. Thus, the first record to seek is a marriage record. To locate it, a researcher needs to know

- where the couple married
- when the couple married
- whether the ancestress married more than once

Where the couple married was often the town of the bride’s family. Of course, if her maiden name is unknown, the residence of her birth family may not be known either. However, the places where the couple lived immediately after they married or where their first child was born may have been identified, and these locations may be close to where the couple married. Check maps and finding aids for boundary and community name changes, since they dictate where to look for records.<sup>1</sup> The name of a place from family lore may be outdated or obsolete. Another possibility is that the couple may have married in a “Gretna Green” town with fewer marriage restrictions.<sup>2</sup>

Next, determine when the couple married. Use the birth year of the first known child as a starting point and work backward. The 1900 and 1910 censuses ask about the length of the present marriage, and the 1930 census records the age at first marriage. It may be helpful to learn about the average age at first marriage in the area at the time. For example, in the Puritan colonies women tended to marry at twenty-three, while in the Chesapeake colonies most girls married at seventeen.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, try to establish whether the woman married more than once. If the record of a later marriage is found, it most likely shows the surname the ancestress used during her marriage to the previous husband. The record of the first marriage is needed to document her maiden name.

Websites cited in this article were viewed on 25 July 2023.

1. “State Maps,” *Maps of US* (<https://www.mapofus.org/state-maps>), and “Atlas of Historical County Boundaries,” *Newberry Library* (<https://digital.newberry.org/ahcb>).

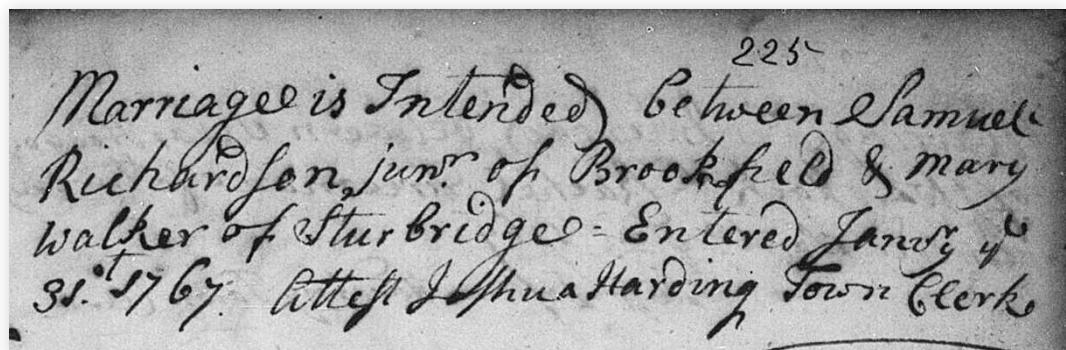
2. “Gretna Greens in the United States,” *FamilySearch* ([https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Gretna\\_Greens\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Gretna_Greens_in_the_United_States)).

3. David Hackett Fischer, *Albion’s Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 75, 284.

## Types of marriage records

Two types of records indicate a marriage: declaration of the intention to marry and evidence that the marriage took place. Before the mid-1800s, evidence of the intention to marry included documents such as marriage intentions, marriage banns, marriage contracts including prenuptial agreements, and marriage bonds.

Marriage intentions were typically recorded by a town clerk and coincided with a local church proclaiming the banns. Banns announcing the upcoming marriage were read in church on three consecutive Sundays or posted on the church door for three weeks; they offered a chance for local citizens to identify any impediments to the nuptials. Banns may appear in the church register or in the county’s probate court records.



Marriage intention, Town of Sturbridge, Worcester County, Massachusetts, 1767 (FamilySearch)

In civil law jurisdictions like Louisiana and Québec, marriage contracts drawn up by a notary spell out what each party would bring to the marriage and provide detailed information about both families. Prenuptial agreements in common law jurisdictions are usually filed in deed books, court records, or marriage records.

Particularly popular in the South, marriage bonds promised payment of a certain sum to a government official if the marriage could not legally proceed. The bond announced the upcoming nuptials and was contracted by the groom and his surety. Often related to the bride, this person who guaranteed payment may have been her father or brother.

KNOW all Men by these presents, That we Charles Reale

and William Whitfield are held and firmly bound unto  
In Pay Esquire, Governor or Chief Magistrate of  
the Commonwealth of Virginia, in the just and full sum of One Hundred and  
Fifty Dollars, to which payment well and truly to be made to the said Governor  
and his successors, for the use of the Commonwealth, we bind ourselves, and each  
of us, our and each of our Heirs, Executors, and Administrators, jointly and  
severally, firmly by these presents, Sealed with our Seals and dated this 12<sup>th</sup>  
day of February 1803

THE CONDITION of the above Obligation is such, That whereas there is a Marriage  
shortly intended to be had and solemnized between the above bound Charles  
Reale and Paleay Whitfield  
Now Therefore, If there be no lawful cause to obstruct said Marriage, then the above  
Obligation to be void, otherwise to remain in full force and virtue.

Signed, Sealed, and delivered  
in the presence of

Charles Reale (SEAL.)  
William Whitfield (SEAL.)

Marriage bond, City of Norfolk, Virginia, 1803 (FamilySearch)

Some jurisdictions required signed verification of parental consent for underage brides or grooms. The threshold for legal age depended on the jurisdiction. Most often, however, the consent was integrated into the banns or bonds. By the mid-1800s in many areas, these documents were replaced by the modern marriage license.

Actual evidence of marriage may take the form of a certificate or register kept by a church, county, town, or city; a personal record, such as a family bible; or a newspaper announcement. Generally, when a minister performed a marriage, he was then required to report or "return" the marriage to the government clerk.

Search for records at the appropriate jurisdictional level, and use the Periodical Source Index<sup>4</sup> and separate journal indexes as finding aids. Two large regional indexes may be helpful:

- *New England Marriages Prior to 1700* by Clarence Almon Torrey, which identifies approximately 99 percent of the more than thirty-seven thousand pre-1700 marriages in New England, including nearly 70 percent of the maiden names. Torrey's book and three supplements by Melinde Lutz Sanborn are available in many libraries and digitized on Ancestry.<sup>5</sup>

▪ Western States Marriage Records Index<sup>6</sup> extracted by Brigham Young University-Idaho. "Most of the pre-1900 marriages are included in the index for Arizona, Idaho, and Nevada." Significant numbers of marriages from eight other western states bring the current total in the database to over nine hundred thousand.

## Other records that may have the maiden name

If the hunt for the marriage record is unsuccessful, or it doesn't yield the maiden name, try following the woman through her various roles as an individual, mother, and sibling. Devise a search strategy that moves from likely sources for discovering a maiden name to less well-known sources, in the following order:

1. the woman's death record (especially in the twentieth century)
2. her children's birth, baptism, marriage, and death records
3. less familiar sources

Form V. S. No. 11-1-200M-114-16

STATE OF OHIO  
BUREAU OF VITAL STAT  
CERTIFICATE OF DEATH

PLACE OF DEATH: *Cuyahoga* REGISTERED

County of *Cuyahoga* Registration District No. *318* File No. *11*  
Township of \_\_\_\_\_  
or \_\_\_\_\_  
Village of *Clarendon* Primary Registration District No. \_\_\_\_\_  
City of \_\_\_\_\_ (No. *54545*) St., *18* Ward \_\_\_\_\_  
[Note: This section is for hospital deaths. Give name of hospital and name of number.]

\* FULL NAME: *Jennie W. Horner*

PERSONAL AND STATISTICAL PARTICULARS

SEX:  COLOR OR RACE:  SINGLE  
*F* *W* *Widowed*  
WIDOWED OR DIVORCED (If wife the world)

DATE OF BIRTH: *July 11 1867* (Month) (Day) (Year)  
AGE: *49 yrs. 3 mos. 27 ds.* If LESS than  
1 day, \_\_\_\_\_ hrs. \_\_\_\_\_ mins.

OCCUPATION: *at home*  
(a) Particular kind of work  
(b) General nature of industry, business, or establishment in which employed (or employer)

STATE OR COUNTRY: *Pennsylvania*

PARENTS

NAME OF FATHER: *John Stinson* (Duration) yrs. mos. ds.  
BIRTHPLACE OF FATHER: *Cuyahoga* (Signed) *J. J. Byrne* M. D.  
MAIDEN NAME OF MOTHER: *Sarah Bratty*  
BIRTHPLACE OF MOTHER: *Pennsylvania*  
THE ABOVE IS TRUE TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE  
(Informant) *A. J. Cannon* (Address) *1416 Williamson Rd.* (Signature) *E. H. Farmer*  
JAN 8 1917 Filed Registrar

LENGTH OF RESIDENCE (For Hospitals, Institutions, Transients, Recent Residents)  
At place \_\_\_\_\_ yrs. mos. ds. In the \_\_\_\_\_  
Where was disease contracted, If not at place of death?  
From \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_  
place of residence *1544 East 120 St.*

PLACE OF BURIAL OR REMOVAL DATE OF BURIAL  
Cleveland Rd. January 8 1917  
UNDERTAKER ADDRESS  
Beach & Co.

Death certificate with names of parents, Cleveland, Cuyahoga, Ohio, 1917 (FamilySearch)

4. "Periodical Source Index," Genealogy Center, Allen County Public Library (<https://www.genealogycenter.info/persi>).

5. "U.S., New England Marriages Prior to 1700," Ancestry (<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/3824>).

6. "About the Western States Marriage Record Index," BYU Idaho (<http://abish.byui.edu/specialCollections/westernStates/aboutWesternStates.cfm>).

If the ancestress died in the twentieth century, her maiden name may appear on her death certificate. Of course, the information on a death certificate is only as good as the knowledge of the informant. Some late nineteenth-century death records may state the woman's maiden name, but it depends on the record-keeping practices of the jurisdiction.

Records of the children of the ancestress—for birth, baptism, marriage, and death—may include their mother's maiden name. Baptismal sponsors were often related to one of the parents. The recording of births in the colonial period tended not to furnish the mother's maiden name. For that era, records may simply say “Jonathan, son of Abel and Sarah,” or just “Jonathan, son of Abel.” Unusual first or middle names given to the children could be surnames from the families of the parents and are worth investigating. If not in the father's line, they might be clues to the mother's family.

In marriage records, identification of the parents of the couple was not common until the late nineteenth century, but if a child of the ancestress married in or after that time, be sure to seek out the record. If any of the woman's children died in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries, the mother's maiden name may be reported on the child's death certificate.

Other sources that may provide a maiden name are listed in table 1. The order for searching them depends on the era.

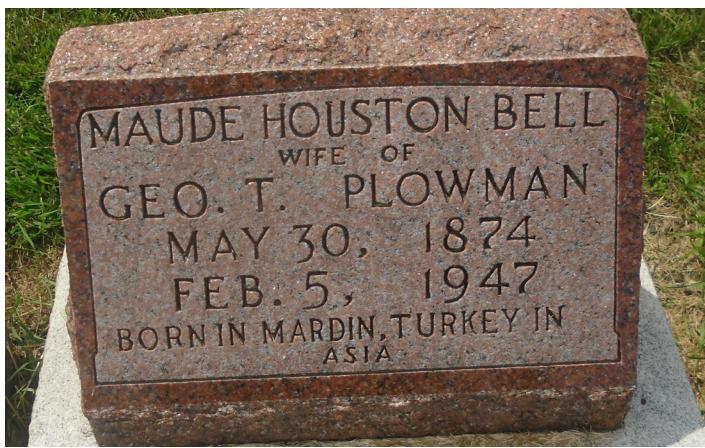
**TABLE 1: LESS WELL-KNOWN SOURCES FOR THE MAIDEN NAME**

Resource	Research Strategy
Cemetery	A woman's maiden name may be on her grave marker or in the cemetery's records.
Deeds	When a parcel of land has been left to children and then sold, the daughter may be listed in the index under her married name. A reading of the deed then reveals her maiden name. Other deeds may record the gift of a father to his married daughter and her husband, or the sale of property she inherited from her father.
Letters and diaries	Seek materials written by residents of the community of the ancestress. These items may reference her parents or siblings.
Military pension file	Search for a widow's pension related to her husband's service in the Revolutionary War, War of 1812, Mexican War, Civil War (Union), Indian Wars, and Spanish-American War. The widow had to prove her marriage to the soldier, and the documentation may give her maiden name.
Newspapers	Search for the woman's death announcement and possibly a wedding anniversary article as well as the marriage and death announcements of her children published after about 1880; later articles are more likely to have detailed information. Check religious and ethnic newspapers in addition to secular newspapers. Even if an obituary doesn't divulge the woman's maiden name, it may report her siblings.
Social Security Application (SS-5)	Look for the SS-5 filed by the woman's children. The form specifies the name of the applicant's father and the mother's maiden name. Ancestry has indexed these names through 2007. <sup>7</sup> For information about requesting a copy of the original application, see <a href="https://www.ssa.gov/foia/request.html">https://www.ssa.gov/foia/request.html</a> .
US federal census <sup>8</sup>	Starting with the 1880 census and going forward, look for “mother-in-law” or “son-in-law” or “sister” (with a different surname in the household of her brother). A person in the woman's household with a different surname from 1850 on may be related to her. Because the informant is not identified until 1940, seek confirmation in other records.
Will	The will of a woman's father or mother may identify her as a daughter and provide her married name. This strategy is most successful if the researcher has a hypothesis about the maiden name and is seeking confirmation. It also works when using a search engine or published index that encompasses all of the names and relationships in a locality's wills. Ancestry is gradually indexing all names in its collections of wills. <sup>9</sup>

7. “U.S., Social Security Applications and Claims Index, 1936–2007,” *Ancestry* (<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/60901>).

8. The 1925 Iowa state census records the maiden name of each adult's mother.

9. In Ancestry's Card Catalog (<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/catalog>), enter the name of the state and “wills” to choose a collection and search it individually.



Tombstone with maiden name of deceased woman, Mound Cemetery, Le Sueur, Minnesota (Find A Grave)

## Important strategies for maiden name research

If none of these records reveal the maiden name, explore information about the husband and his family, associates, and neighbors—his FAN club. Then get immersed in the local history of the couple's first community.

### Learn as much as possible about the husband

Before the twentieth century, men tended to generate more records than women, so it's generally easier to track the husband than his wife. Wives were legally subordinate to their husbands until the gradual passage of married women's property acts and other laws granting them rights.<sup>10</sup>

County and town histories often contain clues that cannot be found elsewhere. Seek a digital or print version of the couple's town or county history to read about the families who settled the town. The husband may be named with other associates. For example, the maiden name of Mary, first wife of Revolutionary War patriot, Jacob Homer, is mentioned only in the *History of Mercer County, Pennsylvania*.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to seeking information about all of the wife's husbands, if she married more than once, locate records about their FAN clubs. Hunt for clues such as the migration patterns of the husband and his ancestors, as families tended to move in groups and

the families of the bride and groom may have traveled together before the couple married. Determine the family's religion and the husband's occupation, which may lead to information in church records and occupation-specific business records.

### Focus on local history

Understanding the history of a location is critical for finding and interpreting records. When was the town settled? When did record-keeping begin? What were the first churches and cemeteries? Which systems (such as government, court, church) handled land transactions, and which handled probate matters? Did the locality experience any major record losses, and do alternatives exist? The FamilySearch Research Wiki can answer some of these questions.<sup>12</sup>

Look for information about patterns of settlement. Early histories reveal not only the names of the first settlers but also clues to their origins. Identifying the surnames in the town of origin and the town of later settlement can be a helpful strategy for discovering a maiden name, as illustrated by the following case study.

### Case Study: Maiden name of Ann Grosvenor of Pomfret, Connecticut

Ann (\_\_\_\_) Grosvenor, the widow of Ebenezer Grosvenor, died 30 July 1743 "in the 56<sup>th</sup> year of her age" and is buried in the Wappaquians Burial Ground, at Pomfret, Connecticut.<sup>13</sup> This age places her birth about 1687. The town of Pomfret was not settled until nearly 1699,<sup>14</sup> so she could not have been born there. The research question is: Where was she born and who were her parents?

In the absence of a marriage record, the question can be answered by tracing the settlement of Pomfret. Its land was purchased in 1686 by twelve men from Roxbury, Massachusetts, but remained unsettled for the next thirteen years. Woodstock, the town immediately north of Pomfret, was also purchased by men from Roxbury; it was settled in 1686.<sup>15</sup>

Ann married Ebenezer Grosvenor about 1707, based on the birth of her first child, Susanna, at

10. "Timeline of Legal History of Women in the United States," National Women's History Alliance (<https://nationalwomenshistoryalliance.org/resources/womens-rights-movement/detailed-timeline>).

11. J. Fraise Richard, editor, *History of Mercer County, Pennsylvania*, (Chicago: Brown, Runk & Co., 1888), 1180. The preface notes that William S. Garvin began the history but died before completing the work.

12. "FamilySearch Research Wiki," FamilySearch ([https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Main\\_Page](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Main_Page)).

13. "Inscriptions in the Wappaquians Burial Ground, Pomfret, Conn., 1723-1861," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 73 (1919): 111.

14. Richard M. Bayles, editor, *History of Windham County, Connecticut* (New York: Preston, 1889), 522.

15. Bayles, *History of Windham County, Connecticut*, 837.

Pomfret on 31 October 1708.<sup>16</sup> Her husband arrived in Pomfret about 1700 with his mother, Esther Grosvenor of Roxbury.<sup>17</sup> Since the settlers of both Pomfret and Woodstock hailed from Roxbury, it is highly likely that Ann's family was also from Roxbury.

A search for female children named Ann, born in Roxbury between 1685 and 1689 (the approximate time of Ann Grosvenor's birth), identified four girls.<sup>18</sup> The surnames of the girls were matched to a list of Woodstock settlers,<sup>19</sup> and two candidates for Ebenezer's wife emerged: Anna Lyon, daughter of Thomas and Abigail, born in 1689, and Anne Massey, daughter of John and Sarah, born in 1687. Anna Lyon died in 1693,<sup>20</sup> leaving Anne Massey as the only viable candidate. Thus, Ann Grosvenor's maiden name was likely Massey (a known version of Marcy<sup>21</sup>). By using this surname, more records can be sought to bolster the proof of her identity.

## Conclusion

As always, work from the known to the unknown. A woman had a life and a name before her

marriage, and when she married her family didn't go away—they probably lived in the area. If records such as marriage bonds, intentions, licenses, and certificates do not exist, learn all about the husband and his family; most likely they interacted with the bride's family. Finally, delve into the history, geography, and record-keeping of the area where the couple first settled, for clues about available records that might lead to the woman's maiden name. 

## Resources

- FamilySearch. "Maiden Names in the United States," *FamilySearch Research Wiki*. [https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Maiden\\_Names\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States](https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Maiden_Names_in_the_United_States)
- Carmack, Sharon DeBartolo. *Finding Female Ancestors*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2013.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *A Genealogist's Guide to Discovering Your Female Ancestors: Special Strategies for Uncovering Hard-to-Find Information About Your Female Lineage*. Cincinnati: Betterway Books, 1998.
- Schaefer, Christina Kassabian. *The Hidden Half of the Family: A Sourcebook for Women's Genealogy*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1999.

16. "Connecticut, U.S., Town Birth Records, pre-1870 (Barbour Collection)," *Ancestry* (<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1034>), record for Susana Grosvenor; citing records of Pomfret, Connecticut.

17. Bayles, *History of Windham County, Connecticut*, 522.

18. "Massachusetts: Vital Records, 1620-1850," *American Ancestors* ([www.americanancestors.org](http://www.americanancestors.org)). Search by Name: Ann\* (exact), Location: Roxbury (exact), Record Type: Birth, Years: 1685 - 1689 ; move the slider for Years from broad to exact, in Search Filters on the left side of the screen.

19. Bayles, *History of Windham County, Connecticut*, 840-841.

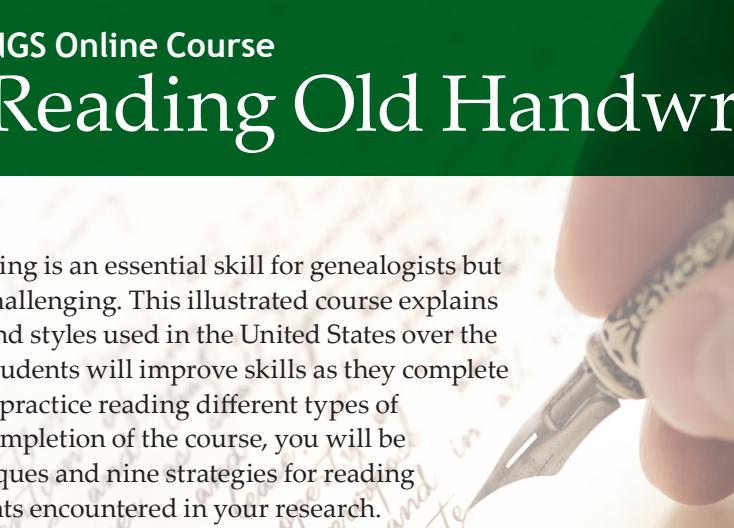
20. "Massachusetts: Vital Records, 1620-1850," *American Ancestors* ([www.americanancestors.org](http://www.americanancestors.org)), record for death of Anna Lyon, 16 October 1693; citing records of Roxbury, Massachusetts.

21. Mrs. Calvin D. Paige, "The Marcy Family," read before the Quinabaug Historical Society, 1902, first page (unnumbered); digital images, *FamilySearch Digital Library* (<https://www.familysearch.org/library/books/records/item/523589>).



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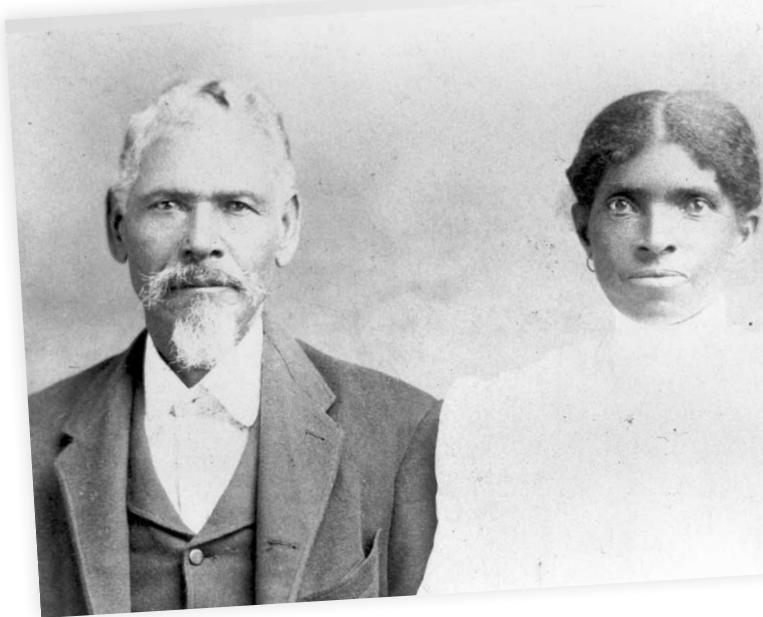


A a	Asal. Anne Abraham and
A a	Asal. Anne Abraham and
B b	Benwits Book bounded
B b	Benwits Book bounded
C c	County consideration
C c	County consideration
D d	Daniel Drew degrees
D d	Daniel Drew degrees
E e	Elizabeth eighteen
E e	Elizabeth eighteen
F f	Fayette forever
F f	Fayette forever

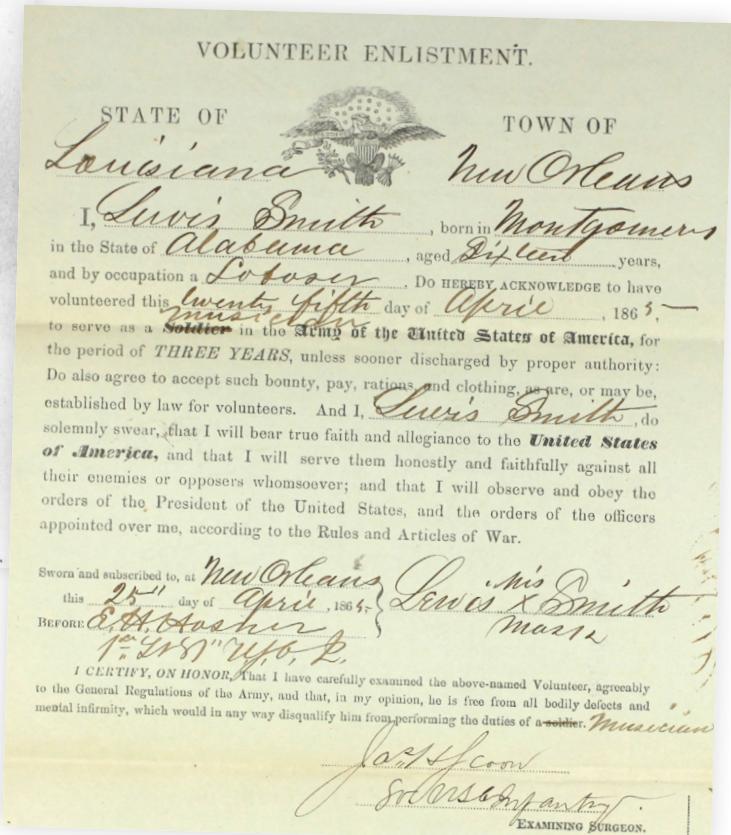
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# The Challenges of Tracing African American Identities

Tony Burroughs, FUGA



Lewis Smith enlisted in the 77th US Colored Infantry at age sixteen (NAID 170779832, National Archives). After the war, he renamed himself Dick Lewis Barnett (photo of Barnett and his wife; Prologue, <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2005/winter/voices>)



Genealogy is based on names as the essential identity markers of individuals. Identification of African Americans historically is challenging due to the inconsistency of surnames and first names. This article discusses the types of names given to enslaved people, the names they gave themselves, and resources and techniques that may help with identifying enslaved and free ancestors.

The surnames of ancestors allow genealogists to link people and track blood lines backwards into history. These markers are not always available for researching African Americans, especially during slavery. When Africans were forced from their native lands and brought to America against their will, they were dehumanized so their labor could be exploited for profit. The process of depersonalization involved stripping their names, language, history, religious and cultural practices, and freedoms.

After emancipation, African Americans asserted their individuality and dignity by declaring their own names. Contrary to popular opinion, they did not always use the surname of their most recent enslaver. Another difficult task is to distinguish enslaved ancestors from others by using only first names.

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**Tony Burroughs**, FUGA, has appeared in twenty-five national and international television programs and delivered one hundred lectures at national genealogy and history conferences including sixteen keynote addresses. Tony researched Olympic gold medalist Michael Johnson's family history and consulted on the genealogies of Oprah Winfrey, Smokey Robinson, Reverend Al Sharpton, and Billy Porter. His book, *Black Roots*, was number one on Essence magazine's Bestseller List. He is also published by Random House and Oxford University Press.

## First names

First names are not necessarily reliable markers of identity for African American ancestors.

### Replacement of African names

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, European Americans forced English names on enslaved Africans to exert their power. An eighteenth-century runaway slave notice in South Carolina shows dual names for an enslaved man. "John ... will more readily answer to the name of Footbea, which he went by in his own country."<sup>1</sup>

Footbea kept his African name but also responded to John, his enslaver's name for him. However, after several generations the name Footbea faded from memory and the family lost its original identity.

### Baptismal names

Part of the process of suppressing African religious practices was forcing enslaved children to be baptized and take Christian names. Enslaved adults also received Christian names through baptism.

There is evidence of this policy in the Danish West Indies, which was sometimes a stopover point for Africans eventually taken to the American mainland. Baptism of enslaved children at birth was mandated starting in 1755. "Christian names (European names relating to biblical characters or saints) [were given] to both infants and adults undergoing baptism."<sup>2</sup>

### Tags for same-named people

Large plantations often had multiple enslaved people with the same first names, so enslavers invented identification tags to keep track of them. In many cases, these tags were not "the names the slaves used among themselves."<sup>3</sup>

In 1839, Josiah Collins or his overseer recorded the names of 285 people enslaved at his Somerset

Place plantation in Washington County, North Carolina. At that time, three females on the plantation were named Matilda. To separate their identities, Collins listed them as Matilda, Tilla, and Chaney. After Chaney became free, she used her real name, Matilda.<sup>4</sup> Without knowledge of her earlier name in the plantation records, a researcher would be unlikely to find her.

Some tags replaced the first names of enslaved people entirely, as Chaney did for Matilda, or were diminutives of first names, like Tilla for Matilda. Suffix tags added after first names might be a parent's name, former enslaver's surname, or occupation, while prefix tags were often adjectives relating to appearance or other characteristics.<sup>5</sup> Suffix tags should not be mistaken for the surnames carried by enslaved people.

### Names in slave narratives

Interviews with formerly enslaved people often mention the complexities of identity. During an 1853 interview, David Holmes stated, "I'm called David, now: I used to be called Tom, sometimes; but I'm not, I'm Jack. It didn't much matter what name I was called by. If master was looking at any one of us, and call us, Tom, or Jack, or anything else, whoever he looked at was forced to answer."<sup>6</sup>

The voices of enslaved people can still be heard in more than eight thousand interviews, letters, speeches, and autobiographies written and collected since the eighteenth century, culminating in the WPA narratives of the 1930s. Many link the names of individuals in slavery and freedom.<sup>7</sup>

### Surnames

Genealogists should be aware of several challenges with using surnames to identify African American ancestors.

Websites cited in this article were viewed on 21 August 2023.

1. *South Carolina Gazette*, 27 August 1757; cited in Hennig Cohen, "Slave Names in Colonial South Carolina," *American Speech* 28 (1952), 103. Several books and websites including Freedom on the Move (<https://app.freedomonthemove.org>) index runaway notices.

2. Sarah Abel, George F. Tyson, and Gisli Palsson, "From Enslavement to Emancipation: Naming Practices in the Danish West Indies," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 61:2 (April 2019): 345–346; CORE API (<https://api.repository.cam.ac.uk/server/api/core/bitstreams/d89a3c03-505e-4ce1-b1af-73fb5429a146/content>).

3. Dorothy Spruill Redford and Michael D'Orso, *Somerset Homecoming: Recovering a Lost Heritage* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 170.

4. Dorothy Spruill Redford, "Members of the Enslaved Community," Somerset Place, North Carolina Historic Sites (<https://historicsites.nc.gov/all-sites/somerset-place/history/enslaved-community/somerset-names>).

5. Newbell Niles Puckett, *Black Names in America: Origins and Usage* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1975), 59–61.

6. L. A. Chamerovzow, *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, ser. 3, I (1 February 1853), 25–28; reprinted in John W. Blassingame, ed., *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 297.

7. Tony Burroughs, "Records Specific to African Americans: Slave Oral History," Paula K. Byers, ed., *African American Genealogical Sourcebook* (Detroit: Gale Research, Inc., 1995), 47–57. See also Kathy Petlewski, "The Slave Narratives of the Federal Writers' Project," *NGS Magazine* 45 (October–December 2019), 34–40.

## Enslaved people recorded without surnames

Most antebellum records refer to enslaved people only by their first names. Considered property,

they are listed in probate files with the enslaver's cattle and household goods, usually without surnames, as shown in figure 1.

The identity of the enslaved person was tied to the enslaver. However, the enslaver could change at any moment by transferring ownership and

Figure 1. Livestock and enslaved people in inventory of Jeremiah Dumas estate, 1857

often did, through estate sales or to settle debts.

## Surnames of enslaved people

The lack of surnames for enslaved people in most records does not mean they had none. The historian Herbert Gutman demonstrated through numerous examples that while enslavers did not recognize their surnames, many enslaved people passed them down over generations to help track kinship. These surnames, which enslaved people often called their titles, usually differed from the names of current enslavers. They are believed to represent a family's earliest known enslaver, as a deliberate strategy to identify family networks.<sup>9</sup>

In 1863, an interviewer for the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission asked Robert Smalls, who had escaped from slavery, about the hesitation of enslaved people in giving their "other name." Smalls answered, "Well, they are apt to go by the one name and when the white folks speak of them they say 'John, that belongs to Mr. So and So,' and they hardly ever use their title. But among themselves they use their titles."<sup>10</sup>

8. Inventory and Account of Sales of the Estate of Jeremiah Dumas, Henry County, Tennessee, Probates Will Book H, 184.

9. Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 232.

10. Blassingame, ed., *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies*, 374.

11. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925*, p. 230-256.

12. David T. Thackery, "A Surname Study of Slaves in Hampshire County, West Virginia," *Origins* 5 (March 1989), Newberry Library, 6.

13. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925*, p. 245.

Surnames were rarely recorded by enslavers.

Gutman based his interpretation on the testimony of formerly enslaved people, pension files, runaway notices and sketches, Loyalist evacuation lists, and other sources.<sup>11</sup> Some names listed in enslavers' records may be identification tags rather than surnames.

**\$100 REWARD.**—I will give the above reward for the apprehension of my negro man Gassaway, called by the servants William Burgess, if taken beyond the limits of Prince George's county, and if taken within the limits of said county fifty dollars; in either case to be brought to me or secured in jail so that I get him in possession. The said negro is about five feet nine or ten inches high; twenty-two years old; black, with bluff face, and contracts his features in a laugh when spoken to.  
THOMAS CLAGETT,  
Near Upper Marlboro', Prince George's co.  
N. B. The said negro left home on Friday morning last, the 10th instant.  
Nov 15—optf

Figure 2. This fugitive was called Gassaway by his enslaver, William Burgess by the servants; Daily National Intelligencer, 16 November 1848, p. 2 (Legacy of Slavery in Maryland)

## Surnames after emancipation

The identities of African Americans continued to be complex after slavery ended. President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation for enslaved people in the Confederacy on 1 January 1863, and the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery in the United States was ratified on 6 December 1865. Freedmen and women continued using the surnames they already had, started using the surnames of their former enslavers, or declared entirely new surnames. Some family members identified themselves by different names for various reasons.

In the author's experience, about 85 percent of freed people did not have the same surname as their last enslaver. There may be regional differences. A study of a West Virginia county found no instances of formerly enslaved people using the surnames of their 1860 enslavers in 1870.<sup>12</sup> Among the Texas and South Carolina freed people who discussed names in the WPA interviews, about a quarter to one third had the surnames of their enslavers.<sup>13</sup>

The likelihood that freed people did not use their enslaver's name has important ramifications for

family historians seeking to identify the final enslaver, in order to research an ancestor before emancipation. An assumption that the enslaver's surname was the same as the ancestor's might lead to wasted time in pursuit of the wrong family. Seek an ancestor's disclosure of the name of his or her enslaver in sources such as Freedman's Bank signature registers, Civil War pension files, slave narratives, and records of the Freedmen's Bureau and Southern Claims Commission.

### Surnames in the 1880 and 1870 censuses

Many African Americans were listed under one surname in the 1880 census and a different surname in the 1870 census. By comparing all members of the households, researchers can usually tell if the family is the same despite different surnames, as shown below.

#### 1880 census: Greene County, Alabama<sup>14</sup>

Minor, W(alton)	40	M	B
Minor, M(argaret)	40	F	B
Minor, M(imm)	11	M	B
Minor, A(ttaway)	10	M	B
Minor, C(lara)	9	F	B
Minor, A(dam)	5	M	B
Minor, F(rancis)	3	F	B

#### 1870 census: Greene County, Alabama<sup>15</sup>

Knott, Walton	27	M	B
Knott, Margaret	23	F	B
Knott, Otaway	2	M	B
Knott, Minia	3	M	B

The Minor family is the same as the Knott family. The names are in the same age order, and the ages approximate the passage of ten years.

In 1870, only five years after emancipation, many formerly enslaved people still lived on the same farm or plantation or nearby. In a small community, the census taker likely knew them, associated them with their former enslaver, and assumed they had adopted that surname. Or the family might have used the enslaver's surname for a few years after emancipation.

In 1880, fifteen years after the Civil War, slavery was further in the past. A new census taker may or may not have associated the members of an African American family with their enslaver. In many situations, this was the first time a formerly enslaved person could declare his or her own surname.

To find families in 1870, try searching the census without surnames, using only first names, birth years, and birth states. For more examples of changing surnames and how researchers discovered them, see "Finding African Americans on the 1870 Census."<sup>16</sup>

### Aliases in pension files

Civil War pension files also provide evidence of the multifaceted identities of African Americans. Many veterans are listed with aliases, as shown in figure 3. Sometimes affidavits in the files explain why the veteran's name was different before and after the war.

NAME OF SOLDIER:	Nelson, Thomas (known as) Upshaw, Thomas			
NAME OF DEPENDENT:	Widow, Nelson, Laura			
SERVICE:	K 110 U.S.C.T. Inf			
DATE OF FILING:	CLASS:	APPLICATION NO.	CERTIFICATE NO.	STATE FROM WHICH FILED:
1925 July 30	Invalid, Widow, Minor,	912 648 1235 619	904 661 963,653	Tenn

Figure 3. Civil War pension index card for Thomas Nelson, previously known as Thomas Upshaw (National Archives)

**Thomas Upshaw alias Thomas Nelson.** Thomas Upshaw served in Company K of the 110th Regiment US Colored Troops (USCT) and applied as Thomas Nelson for a pension on 30 July 1925. His first cousin, who served in the same company, signed an affidavit verifying Thomas's name and service. The cousin stated, "In slave times Thomas Upshaw's mother

14. 1880 federal census, Greene County, Alabama, population schedule, Forkland, ED 81, p. 122A (stamped), family 57, W. Minor household. The researcher for this family, Janis Forté, determined the full names from other sources.

15. 1870 federal census, Greene County, Alabama, population schedule, Forkland, p. 731 (stamped), p. 62 (penned), family 429, Walton Knott household.

16. Tony Burroughs, "Finding African Americans on the 1870 Census," *Heritage Quest* 91 (February 2001), 50-56.

belonged to Lewis Upshaw and his father belonged to Nelson, and when he joined the U.S. Army he took the name of Upshaw and when he came out of the Army he went back to his father's name.”<sup>17</sup>

This type of name change was not uncommon. Many enslaved men lived apart from their spouses and children on another farm. Therefore, the family had two enslavers with two different surnames. Children were often identified with the surname of their mother’s enslaver.

**Lewis Smith alias Dick Lewis Barnett.** Dick Lewis Barnett had a similar experience. He applied for a pension on 17 May 1911 and made this statement.

My full name is Dick Lewis Barnett. I am the applicant for pension on account of having served in Company B, 77th U.S. Colored Infantry and Company D, 10th U.S. Colored Heavy Artillery under the name Lewis Smith which was the name I wore before the days of slavery were over... I am the identical person who was named called and known as Dick Lewis Smith before the Civil War and during the Civil War and until I returned home after my military service...

I was born in Montgomery County, Ala. the child of Phillis Houston, slave of Sol Smith. When I was born my mother was known as Phillis Smith and I took the name of Smith too. I was called mostly Lewis Smith till after the war, although I was named Dick Lewis Smith—Dick was the brother of John Barnett whom I learned was my father...

When I got home after the war, I was wearing the name of Lewis Smith, but I found that the negroes after freedom were taking the names of their father like the white folks. So I asked my mother and she told me my father [was] John Barnett, a white man, and I took up the name of Barnett.<sup>18</sup>

African American veterans sometimes expressed other reasons for changing their names. *Voices of Emancipation* discusses interviews conducted by special examiners to clarify identity and other issues.<sup>19</sup> Biographical profiles in *Borrowed Identity* provide numerous examples of name changes for veterans

of the 128th US Colored Troops organized in South Carolina.<sup>20</sup>

Surname differences have caused many genealogists to miss an African American ancestor in Civil War records if they rely on an index to Complied Military Service Records (CMSR). The CMSR is an abstract of an individual's military service records created

during the war. It lists only the man's name when he enlisted, as shown in figure 4, not any name he might have used after the war. Civil War recruiters often recorded his surname as that of his former enslaver, assuming the new soldier or sailor used the same surname. If the veteran did not apply for a pension, his later alias has to be sought in other records.

## Linking the identities of enslaved and freed African Americans

Researching entire families and clusters of family members is essential to identify individual African Americans without recorded surnames in slavery and with differing surnames after emancipation.

David T. Thackery used this strategy to trace the likely identities of African Americans on a rare 1860 slave schedule that lists first names, taken in Hampshire County, Virginia.<sup>21</sup> First name and age were not sufficient to identify one of the enslaved twelve-year-old boys called John in 1860 as twenty-two-year-old John Bartlett in 1870. However, John

17. Civil War Pension File of Thomas Upshaw, alias Thomas Nelson, Laura Nelson's Widow's Certificate #965653, Co. K, 110th USCT, filed 30 July 1925; Record Group 15, Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs, National Archives, Washington, DC.

18. Civil War Pension File of Lewis Smith, alias Dick Lewis Barnett, Co. B, 77th US Colored Infantry, and Co. D, 10th US Colored Heavy Artillery; transcribed in “Changing Names,” 12 May 2020, *Facing History & Ourselves* (<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/changing-names>).

19. Elizabeth A. Regosin and Donald R. Shaffer, *Voices of Emancipation: Understanding Slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction through the U.S. Pension Bureau Files* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

20. John R. Gourdin, *Borrowed Identity, 128th United States Colored Troops: Multiple-Name Usage by Black Civil War Veterans Who Served with Union Regiments Organized in South Carolina* (Westminster, MD: Heritage Books, 2009).

21. This schedule is an anomaly, one of only nine 1850 and 1860 slave schedules known to list first names of enslaved people. The other eight are cited in Tony Burroughs, “Do Slave Schedules Accurately Report Owners?,” *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 110:3 (September 2022), 207-208.

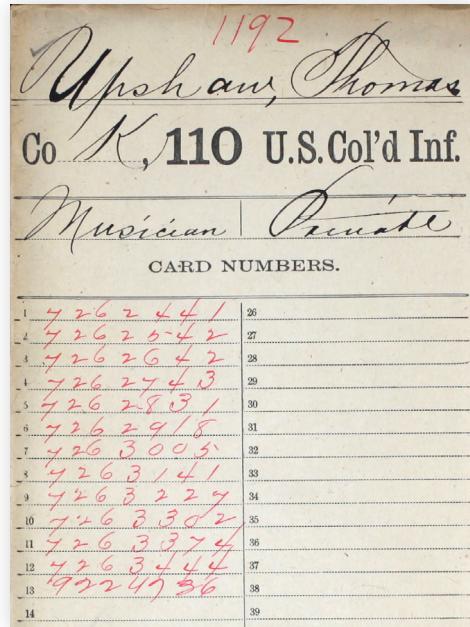


Figure 4. Thomas Upshaw's CMSR jacket, with no cross-reference to his later name, Thomas Nelson (National Archives)

Bartlett's 1870 household includes Nancy Bartlett, forty-six, and Dafney Bartlett, twenty. The 1860 slave schedule enumerates, under the name of John W. Moore, fourteen enslaved people including John, twelve, Nancy, thirty-five, and Dafney, ten.<sup>22</sup> John Bartlett seems to match as a member of this family.

Genealogists cannot research enslaved individuals in isolation because they are rarely recorded with surnames. They must understand family groups and research extended families. Reading articles about how other researchers have overcome name issues can be helpful. To find articles in the *National Genealogical Society Quarterly*, search the index by keywords at <https://www.ngsgenealogy.org/ngsq>.

Valuable information about families appears in advertisements placed in newspapers by formerly

MR. EDITOR—I wish to find my brothers James Bethel and Stephen Fight, and Mary Bates and Malinda Stokes. I left them in DeCalb county, Tenn. My father's name was Woolsey Givens and my sister Sallie Givens. They belonged to Mr George Givens. My name is George Bates. My wife is Lou Bates; her brother Gidd Buttoner. I wish to find also Mr. Tom Bailiff and Catt Bates, all of DeCalb county, Tenn. My name is now George Knowles, Bell P. O., Clay county, Miss.

*Multiple surnames in lost-family advertisement, Southwestern Christian Advocate (New Orleans, LA), 19 January 1888 (Last Seen: Finding Family After Slavery)*

enslaved people hoping to reconnect with relatives. To search a database of 3,500 advertisements between 1832 and 1922, visit Last Seen: Finding Family After Slavery, at <https://informationwanted.org>.

## Conclusion

Genealogy is based on names as a way to identify people. Researchers follow the male surname and struggle to learn the woman's maiden name. African American genealogists cannot merely search for names, because the names of their ancestors sometimes changed, were not recorded, or were recorded differently. They

have to search for people, with more identifying characteristics and corroborating evidence than names, so name differences will not lead them astray. Researching families will help genealogists overcome the challenges of identifying African American individuals. 

22. Thackery, "A Surname Study of Slaves in Hampshire County, West Virginia," 3.

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# Rediscovering an Immigrant's Original Surname

Roslyn Torella

TRIPPLICATE

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
PETITION FOR CITIZENSHIP  
No. 133847

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

DECLARATION OF INTENTION  
(Invalid for all purposes seven years after the date hereof)

STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA | In the DISTRICT Court  
WESTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA of THE UNITED STATES of PITTSBURGH, PA.

I, JOHN DOUGLAS, now residing at Woodlawn Ave., West Brownsville, Washington, Pennsylvania, occupation Railroad Flagman, aged 39 years, do declare on oath that my personal description is: Sex Male, color White, complexion Fair, color of hair Light Brown, height 5 feet 7 1/2 inches; weight 140 pounds; visible distinctive marks None.

race Slovak; nationality Hungary. I was born in Poloma-Hungary, on January 2nd 1892. I am married. The name of my wife or husband is Anna, we were married on May 12th 1913. I was born at Austria, on May 3, 1892. I reside at New York, N.Y., on about July 1st, 1922, for permanent residence therein, and now resides at West Brownsville, Pa. I have 6 children, and the name, date and place of birth, and place of residence of each of said children are as follows: VIRGINIA M. November 6th 1913; KATHERINE S. April 22nd 1915; JOHN J. December 3rd 1916; BETTY J. June 3rd 1922; PAUL W. May 30th 1926; WILLIAM G. August 10th 1927; all born and reside West Brownsville, Pa.

I have not heretofore made a declaration of intention: Number \_\_\_\_\_, on \_\_\_\_\_.

at \_\_\_\_\_ my last foreign residence was \_\_\_\_\_ (City or town) \_\_\_\_\_ (State or country) \_\_\_\_\_ (Year) \_\_\_\_\_ (Date). I emigrated to the United States of America from \_\_\_\_\_ (City or town) \_\_\_\_\_ (Country) \_\_\_\_\_ (Year) \_\_\_\_\_ (Date). my lawful entry for permanent residence in the United States was at \_\_\_\_\_ (City or town) \_\_\_\_\_ (Country) \_\_\_\_\_ (Year) \_\_\_\_\_ (Date) under the name of **Dukles, Janos**.

[SEAL]

John Douglas  
Subscribed and sworn to before me in the office of the Clerk of said Court, at Pittsburgh, Pa., this 23rd day of November, anno Domini 1922. Certification No. 6-1624, from the Commissioner of Naturalization showing the lawful entry of the declarant for permanent residence on the date stated above, has been received by me. The photograph affixed to the duplicate and triplicate hereof is a likeness of the declarant.

J. WOOD CLARK,  
Clerk of the U.S. District Court.  
By M. S. Dyer, Deputy Clerk.

14-2025 U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE 1922

A critical piece of information for researching an immigrant ancestor is the original surname. Consider the difference between Walker and Waszkiewicz. Without the original name, conducting research in an ancestral land is nearly impossible, and the immigrant's early records in America may be missed. Knowing an ancestor's original surname can help uncover a family's immigration experience and how its members assimilated into a new culture.

Standardized spelling is relatively recent, and it was common for surnames to undergo slight changes such as Smythe to Smith. Pronunciation of names could also evolve over time, impacting their spelling. This type of evolution occurred naturally, but many immigrants chose to make changes that are challenging to research. This article explores the types and reasons for intentional surname changes and provides tips, tools, and resources for discovering the original names of immigrants.

All names are subject to spelling variations in records, and it may not be possible to determine the precise form of an original name. However, by learning about previous versions of the name, researchers can be better prepared to recognize whether a record pertains to an ancestor and follow the correct identity.

Figure 1. The declaration of intention filed by John Douglas lists his original name as Janos Dukles (Ancestry)

**Roslyn Torella** is a retired federal government employee specializing in Italian and immigrant genealogy through her business, Mahoning Valley Roots. She wrote a monthly Italian genealogy column for *La Gazzetta Italiana* for many years and is treasurer and newsletter editor for the Mahoning County Chapter of the Ohio Genealogical Society. She conducts workshops, lectures on genealogy, and is a member of the Association of Professional Genealogists.

## Why ancestors changed their surnames

An understanding of the typical reasons for change may help in discovering original surnames.

### Wanting to assimilate

To make their transition smoother, some immigrants opted to Americanize their surnames to more commonly used names, especially when they moved out of their ethnic community. Americanizing a surname involves making it sound or look more mainstream (usually English).<sup>1</sup> For example, Petrovich might become Peters.

### Prejudice and antisemitism

An ethnic surname could hinder an ancestor from securing a good job, advancing in a career, or even finding a place to reside. Many immigrants changed their names to avoid negative consequences. For instance, Feldstein could become Felden.<sup>2</sup>

### Hard to pronounce or spell

Americans struggled to spell or even say foreign surnames that seemed unusual, especially names with numerous syllables and consecutive vowels or consonants. Immigrants often opted to simplify their surnames. For example, Napolitano might become Naples.

### Distinguishing themselves from other families with the same name

It could get confusing if several families had members with the same first and last name in a community, so it was not unusual for one family to change their surname slightly. Or perhaps, one family branch rose to a higher class and no longer wanted to be associated with their poorer or improper kin.

### Trying to hide

Changing a surname was advantageous for those who wished to conceal their past. A person could assume a completely new name without any legal formalities. Even today, a court order is required only for changing a name on government documents.<sup>3</sup>

Websites cited in this article were viewed on 7 June 2023.

1. The term anglicized is often used, but an immigrant's new community was not always dominated by people of English descent. In some localities, most people spoke non-English languages that influenced names.

2. See Kirsten Fermaglich, *A Rosenberg by Any Other Name: A History of Jewish Name Changing in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2018).

3. Judy G. Russell, "What's in a Name?" 12 March 2013, Legal Genealogist blog (<https://www.legalgenealogist.com/2012/03/12/whats-in-a-name>).

### THE ELLIS ISLAND MYTH

Contrary to popular belief, officials at Ellis Island and other immigration stations did not change the surnames of immigrants.

The names of all immigrants on ship manifests from 1820 onwards were based on tickets purchased in their country of origin as reported by individuals who spoke their language. If the immigrant had several connections on the journey, the name might have been misspelled at any point.<sup>4</sup>

Mistakes may have occurred in transcription of names in non-Latin alphabets or with diacritical marks.<sup>5</sup>

But American immigration officials did not create new lists; they used the ship manifests already compiled and were not allowed to alter identifying information, unless the immigrant requested it or an error was found. Further, the immigration officials could easily communicate with immigrants since they were fluent in foreign languages.<sup>6</sup>

Most immigrants spent only a few hours on Ellis Island, and identity documents were not issued at any immigration stations. Changes to surnames typically occurred after immigrants settled in America.



An immigrant at Ellis Island talking with an official, 1907-1917. Bain Collection, Library of Congress (<https://www.loc.gov/item/97501640>)

4. Marian L. Smith, "American Names: Declaring Independence," 8 August 2005, *Immigration Daily* blog, *Immigration Law Worldwide* (<https://www.ilw.com/articles/2005/0808-smith.shtml>).

5. Kathy Petlewski, "Who Changed Our Ancestors' Names?" *NGS Magazine* 41 (January–March 2015), 46.

6. Smith, "American Names: Declaring Independence." For more details, see Joel Weintraub, "The Ellis Island Name Change Myth," *One-Step Webpages* by Stephen P. Morse (<https://stevemorse.org/ellis/EllisMythNames.htm>).

## Typical ways surnames were changed

If an immigrant was illiterate, officials and employers wrote the name phonetically as they heard it, which may account for many variations of one individual's surname. Some immigrants accepted and adopted these changes in their surnames as they strove to become more American.

Most surnames were changed informally, since legal changes were optional and involved fees. Changed surnames often went through several transitions before becoming settled. Finding one example of a surname change does not mean related names changed in a similar manner. Every person and family took an individual approach.

One strategy was to Americanize the spelling of names while maintaining similar pronunciation, such as changing Igelhard to Eagleheart. Complex names were simplified, like Szymanski which became Shimansky. Another approach was incorporating familiar elements to adapt foreign-sounding names, such as Pfaltzbach becoming Balsbaugh. Lengthy names underwent shortening, like Kafcaloudes shrinking to Kaff. Translation into English was common, such as Bleu translated to Blue. Some people adopted entirely unrelated names, as shown in the shift from Buongrazio to Brent. In these cases, the ethnic heritage of the name was completely lost.

Names that originally used a different alphabet, such as Greek, Arabic, or Cyrillic, were transliterated. Diacritical marks commonly found in Eastern European names were omitted, changing their pronunciation. Some immigrants had patronymic names that changed in every generation or farm names that varied whenever they moved; they stopped these practices and chose a consistent surname, which might have been neither the patronymic nor the farm name.

The descendants of immigrants may have changed their surnames a generation or more later. Sometimes siblings took different surnames. With name changes, expect the unexpected.

## Records to search for an original surname

Start by searching for records passed down in the family, such as passports, emigration documents,

letters, postcards, bibles, funeral cards, and labeled photographs. Ask family members what they know about an original surname, and visit cemeteries to check names on tombstones. Then search for the family's earliest public records in America. The oldest record is a passenger list, but that search may have to be put on hold until there is evidence of the initial surname.

Seek the early records of all immigrant relatives, not just the ancestor. Be open to unusual variations of the name, and place most reliance on records with primary information supplied by the immigrant.

In documents with signatures, pay close attention to how the immigrant spelled the name at the time.

## Naturalization records

Naturalization documents such as the declaration of intention and petition for naturalization can provide an original foreign surname. On 27 September 1906, the federal government became responsible for the process, and applicants were required to state their original surname as shown in figure 1.<sup>7</sup> Earlier records vary depending on the court, and the original surname may not be listed.

After 27 September 1906, name changes could be done at the same time as naturalization for no additional fees, so many immigrants took advantage of this opportunity and formalized their name changes. The federal records are held by the National Archives facility serving the state in which the federal court is located.<sup>8</sup> Some naturalization records are digitized on Ancestry, Fold3, and FamilySearch.

To determine if and when an ancestor naturalized, census records can be helpful. The 1870 census indicates whether a man was a citizen. The 1900-1930 censuses have these abbreviations: NA for naturalized American citizen, AL for alien, and PA for someone who has filed a declaration of intent. The 1920 census records the year of naturalization.<sup>9</sup>

## Marriage records

The records of immigrants or their children who married soon after arrival may have the surnames they were still using. Check the marriage license application for the most comprehensive information (typically in the local clerk of court's office).

7. Naturalization Act of 1906, 34 Stat. 596.

8. Naturalization Records, *National Archives* (<https://www.archives.gov/research/immigration/naturalization>).

9. "Clues in Census Records, 1850-1940," *National Archives* (<https://www.archives.gov/research/census/1850-1940>).

## Birth and religious records

It was common for surnames to change as families became more established and their children started school. The birth, baptismal, and confirmation records of the first children born in America may include the original surname.

## Military records

All men of a certain age had to register for the draft in World War I and World War II, regardless of their citizenship. Draft registration cards contain the name of the draft registrant and the person who would always know his address, usually a close relative, who may not yet have changed the surname even if the registrant had. In a pension file, documents may provide clues about an original surname or discrepancy, since the claimant had to prove identity.

## Census records

Although census records are prone to misspellings, they hold valuable information. Start with the most recent census available for the family and work backward through all earlier censuses to the first after their arrival. Check the given names of family members to be sure the record applies to the same household. It was common for relatives to live in the same neighborhood, so examining the names of nearby families could provide helpful clues.

34	1212199210	Baal' Anton	Head	0 3500	\$1	W 28	S 28	Bar. 100	Anatija
35		Victoria	Wife - H			7-11	23	Bar. 100	Anatija
36		Marvin	dm			7-11	23	Bar. 100	Penmayhamia
37		Dimp	Daughter			7-11	23	Bar. 100	Chic
38		Anthony	dm			7-11	23	Bar. 100	Chic

Figure 2. Anthony Ball's original name appears in the 1930 census (Youngstown, Mahoning County, Ohio). Armed with the name of Anton Baal, the author located his 1921 passenger list.

## Fraternal and benevolent societies

Benevolent societies formed by immigrants in the late 1800s and early 1900s are important but often overlooked resources for family history research. Based on various criteria, such as ethnicity, religion,

and country of origin, these societies were established to assist members in times of need and help them navigate life in a new country.

Some societies have existed for over a century and have records, histories, and photographs containing unique family history information. Use Google to locate societies where ancestors once

lived. Many societies have websites or Facebook pages that provide contact information for inquiring about records. Early records may be written in the native language, and surnames may be unchanged as shown in figure 3.

## Newspapers

It's essential to review newspapers—especially foreign-language newspapers—as they may hold vital information. Local historical or genealogical societies can assist in identifying which newspapers were in circulation. English-

ELENCO DEI SOCI FONDATORI	
Pietro Pirone	Paolo Testa
Gio: Santangelo	Giovanni Cicciarelli
Giosue' Ferraro	Michele Fieramosca
Antonio Borrelli	Giovanni Silvestro
Francesco Natale	Domenico Ruozzo
Salvatore Gualtiri	Giovanni Allegretti
Giuseppe D'Alonzo	Antonio Di Domenico
Domenico Scali	Pellegrino Schettino
Antonio Rossi	Antonio Manegia
Vitaliano Leardo	Michele Buiello
Antonio Angelo	Vincenzo Parenti
Agostino Vespasiano	Pasquale Sciumi
Elpidio Buonpane	Antonio D'Onofrio
Nicola Sacco	Giuseppe Fisci

Figure 3. A 1906 membership book lists Giuseppe Fisci, later called Joe Fisher, as one of the charter members of the Mt. Carmel Society of Lowellville, Ohio (author's collection)

language newspapers may also contain articles about immigrant groups and their activities, including the names of members, reports of citizenship, and notices of legal name changes, possibly in a court news column. Obituaries may list relatives who had not changed their surnames.

## Name change records

Some immigrants changed their surnames through official channels such as court filings and state legislatures. Courts

often required the listing of original surnames and aliases. A selected bibliography of published name changes, organized by state, is included in *The Name IS the Game*.<sup>10</sup> Ancestry has collections for Massachusetts and Oregon (search the catalog for

10. Lloyd De Witt Bockstruck, *The Name IS The Game: Onomatology and the Genealogist* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2013), 83-85.

“name changes”), while FamilySearch has name-change records for a variety of courts. The New Jersey Department of State has a database of legal name changes from 1847 to 1947 at [https://wwwnet-dos.state.nj.us/DOS\\_ArchivesDBPortal/NameChanges.aspx](https://wwwnet-dos.state.nj.us/DOS_ArchivesDBPortal/NameChanges.aspx).

## Strategies and tools for finding original names

Create a timeline to help organize research. Use it to determine what records might be available, document findings, and track all versions of a surname, to see if any patterns emerge that could lead to other clues or records.

Research the immigrant’s ethnic group and explore the surnames of the ancestral place. Surname dictionaries and studies have been published for many languages. The classic for American names is *Dictionary of American Family Names*.<sup>11</sup> Its five volumes contain eighty thousand entries and scholarly discussion on naming customs for thirty language families, including Americanizing of names. The FamilySearch Research Wiki (<https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki>) provides information about names for many countries; search for the name of the country and “naming customs.”

### Ethnic surname sites

To find potential candidates for original surnames, search for sites that provide lists of common surnames for different ethnicities. For example, a Google search for “Americanized Polish surnames” returns a result for the Polish Genealogical Society of Connecticut and the Northeast. Its web page (<https://pgsctne.org/changed-surname-list>) lists nearly two hundred Polish surname changes. The beginning of the list is shown in figure 4.

### Foreign telephone directories

If the ancestral village of an immigrant is known, search online telephone directories for the nearest city. Families with similar surnames may still reside there, providing the current spelling of the original surname.

Changed Surname	Original Surname	Location From Which Information Was Taken
Adams	Adamowski	New Britain, CT
Adams	Adamowski	Worcester, MA
Agantovich	Agentowicz	Eynon, PA
Albro	Alibozek	New Britain, CT
Ambrose	Ambrozewicz	Mt. Carmel, PA
Andrews	Andrzejewski	DE
Barsh	Barszcz	Shamokin, PA
Barvitskie	Barwicki	Shamokin, PA
Bates	Bodzioch	New Britain, CT
Bear	Niedzwiecki	New Britain, CT
Bedrick	Biedrzycki	Hartford, CT
Bloom	Kwiatkowski	CT and PA
Bluges	Bludzisz	Shamokin, PA

Figure 4. Changed Surname List Database (Polish Genealogical Society of Connecticut and the Northeast)

### Google Translate

Use Google Translate (<https://translate.google.com>) to learn how surnames are pronounced in their native languages. Select the language, type the name, and click on the Listen icon under Look Up Details. Hearing the correct pronunciation may generate ideas about how the name could have changed.

### Autosomal DNA and Y-DNA tests

Shared DNA matches can help find cousins whose surname may not have changed. AncestryDNA, 23andMe, FamilyTreeDNA, and MyHeritage offer autosomal testing, which can yield results for maternal and paternal lines.

### DNA AND SURNAME CHANGES: IS HE REALLY A REESE?

Mark Reese faced a brick wall with his great-grandfather John Reese. He could not find much of a paper trail for John other than records for John’s son, Samuel Reese, born in 1883. All records for Samuel indicated that his father was John Reese, but a family story claimed Samuel had been adopted. So Mark turned to DNA to look for other relatives who could help. Mark first tested with AncestryDNA and 23andMe. With these autosomal results, he was able to connect to others who descended from John Reese and his wife, Sarah Lewis. The matches yielded few clues to any other Reese lines beyond John Reese. But now Mark knew that Samuel was likely not adopted and was the natural child of John and Sarah.

Mark then turned to Y-DNA testing at FamilyTreeDNA. His theory was that if his paternal line came from a Reese, his Y-DNA matches should include others with the surname of Reese. Mark did not find a single match with the surname of Reese, but he did find several matches with the Welsh surname of Rhys. Now Mark can restart his search for his paternal line, using the Rhys surname.

11. Patrick Hanks, Simon Lenarčič, and Peter McClure, *Dictionary of American Family Names*, second edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

FamilyTreeDNA provides Y-DNA testing, which is best for paternal lines. Each company has its own DNA-matching algorithms and customer database. To cast a wider net for matches, test with multiple companies.

### One-Step Webpages by Stephen P. Morse

Several search tools that can be used to easily find and visualize passenger list results for foreign surnames are available for free at <https://www.stevemorse.org>.

The Gold Form (<https://stevemorse.org/ellis2/ellisgold.html>), the most robust and versatile One-Step search tool for Ellis Island, is especially helpful when searching by ancestral town. It can yield useful information even for ancestors who did not arrive at the port of New York, because relatives from their village who passed through Ellis Island are included in the results. (The site also has tools for searching other major ports.)

The search shown in figure 5 is focused solely on the town of Apatin in the former Austria-Hungarian Empire. The resulting list of 1,742 passengers who reported Apatin as their residence (portion in figure 6) is sorted alphabetically by surname. Lists can also be sorted by arrival date and other factors.

Lists can be quickly scanned by name, birth, and arrival year to search for ancestors and relatives. Review of surnames originating from the same ancestral place can provide clues to an immigrant's original name or previously unknown relatives. For example, perhaps an ancestor from Apatin changed his surname to Andrews. As shown in figure 6, immigrants with the original surnames of Andresz, Andricz, Andricek, and Andricsek came from the same hometown.

Registration for a free account at <https://heritage.ngs.org>.

Figure 5. Ellis Island Gold Form search, focused solely on a town (One-Step Webpages)

27	Andresz, Anna	Apatin, Hungary	24	1886-1887	1911
28	Andresz, Janos	Apatin, Austria	23	1885-1886	1909
29	Andresz, Theresia	Apatin, Austria	20	1888-1889	1909
30	Andricek, Johann	Apatin, Jugoslav	18	1902-1903	1921
31	Andricek, Katalin	Apatin, Hungary	16	1895-1896	1912
32	Andricek, Eva	Apatin, Hungary	36	1875-1876	1912
33	Andricek, Eva	Apatin, Hungary	10	1901-1902	1912
34	Andricek, Ferencz	Apatin, Hungary	9	1902-1903	1912
35	Andricsek, Ferencz	Apatin	36	1870-1871	1907
36	Andricsek, Istvan	Apatin	4	1901-1902	1906
37	Andricsek, Janos	Apatin	33	1872-1873	1906
38	Andricsek, Miklos	Apatin, Hungary	14	1897-1898	1912
39	Andricsek, Terez	Apatin	13	1892-1893	1906
40	Andricsek, Veronika	Apatin	35	1870-1871	1906
41	Andrisz, Jozsel	Apatin	25	1880-1881	1906

Figure 6. Search results for some of the passengers from the same town. The site provides links to their passenger records, manifest and ship images (One-Step Webpages)

[statueofliberty.org/passenger](http://statueofliberty.org/passenger) enables the researcher to view passenger lists (manifests) directly from the search results. For instructions on viewing Ancestry images, see <https://stevemorse.org/library.html>.

### Conclusion

Many immigrants to America changed their surnames for individual reasons and in a variety of ways. Finding an original surname requires a systematic approach. Thoroughly investigating available records, exploring the surnames of the immigrant's homeland, and using tools like DNA testing and Steve Morse's One-Step Webpages can help solve this frustrating research problem and shed light on a family's history. 

# Making Sense of Name Inconsistencies

Researchers are often frustrated and even misled by trying to identify ancestors whose names varied during their lifetimes.

Names may have changed officially through adoption, wives taking their husbands' names, or court actions. Surnames could change informally due to pronunciation, Americanization, or other factors. Individuals might reject their first names in favor of a middle name, their initials only, a diminutive (nickname), or a completely different name. This article suggests strategies that may be used to solve given name and surname inconsistencies.

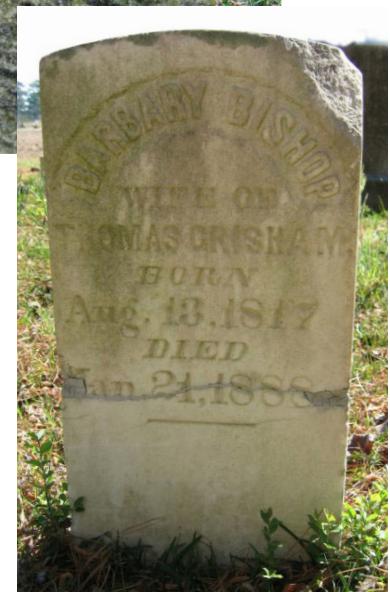
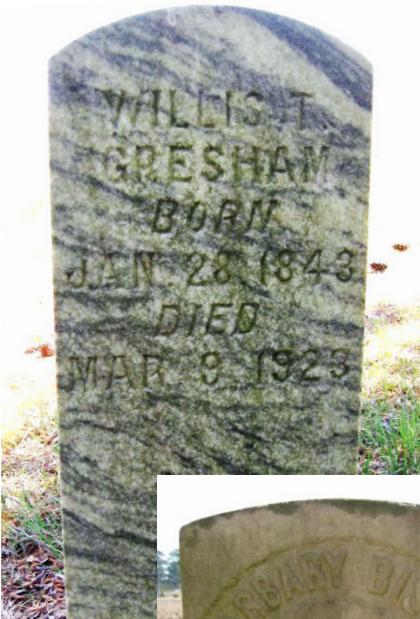
## Surname variations: the Gresham family of Duplin County, North Carolina

My husband's surname, Gresham, is that of a British family dating back to the time of William the Conqueror. There is a Gresham College in England and a Gresham Hotel in Dublin, so I felt safe in assuming the name had not changed over time. It took just one visit to the family cemetery to prove me wrong and cure my fixation with a single spelling. Male siblings A. J. Gresham, C. F. Gresham, and Willis T. Gresham all had markers with an *e* used in their surname. Their father, Thomas, was a Grisham, and their mother's marker was inscribed "Barbary Bishop, wife of Thomas Grisham."<sup>1</sup> This was just the beginning of the multitude of variations of this surname.

Thomas Grisham died in 1881. A search of the 1880 federal census revealed Thos Grisham, seventy-one, and his wife Barbara in Limestone Township, Duplin County, North Carolina.<sup>2</sup> I then searched Ancestry for Thomas Grisham on the 1870 census. While I found individuals that matched that name, none were living in North Carolina. Nor did a search for Thomas Gresham yield results.

Websites cited in this article were viewed on 18 September 2023.

1. Thomas Gresham Cemetery, Beulaville, Duplin County, North Carolina.
2. 1880 US census, Duplin Co., NC, population schedule, Limestone Township, ED 72, p. 22 (penned), family 208, Thos Grisham household.



Gresham spelling in 1923; Grisham spelling in 1888, for Willis Gresham's parents (photos by author)

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## ■ REFERENCE DESK

Family tradition said that Thomas was a farmer who had lived in the same area for many years, so I browsed Limestone Township listings, one page at a time. I finally located a Thomas Grissom, sixty-one, living in Limestone Township with Barbara and children including Willis T., Amos J., and Caleb F. Grissom.<sup>3</sup> The location of the family in Limestone Township along with individuals I knew to be family members convinced me I had the correct person. The ages of Thomas and Barbara were exactly ten years younger than in the 1880 census. Neighbors with the surname of Whaley were present on both census pages. All clues pointed to another variation of the original surname.

With this new spelling, I checked the 1860 census. In the Ancestry search screen, I set the spelling of Grissom to Exact and Similar, with a focus on United States and a birth year of 1808. There were no results for individuals in Duplin County, North Carolina. I then changed the search setting to Broad for the spelling of Grissom and repeated the search. This time Ancestry returned an entry for a Thomas Grisom, fifty-one, living in North Division, Duplin County, North Carolina. Barbary and the same children were enumerated in his household.<sup>4</sup> While the database indexes his surname as Grisom, a close examination of the handwriting on the census image reveals that the name is actually spelled Grisam. The *a* is very clearly the same as the *a* in Thomas.

A check of the 1850 census immediately retrieved a Thomas Grisham who lived in North Carolina.<sup>5</sup> However, this person lived in Granville County, over one hundred miles northwest of Duplin County, with a woman named Elizabeth and youngsters named Richard and Woodson. While he was a farmer and within six years of the age of the ancestor I was seeking, this was not enough to convince me I had the correct person.

After setting my search to Broad for the spelling of "Grisam," I located Thomas Gressman, forty-two, living in North Division, Duplin County. Barbary, Willis, Amos, Caleb, and the other children were all in the household, with correct ages.<sup>6</sup> The Kennedy (Kenady) family were still neighbors as in 1860. Given this supporting evidence, I concluded that Thomas Gressman was actually Thomas Grisham.

4	382	Thomas Grisam	51	m
5		Barbary	44	f
6	.	Charles J.	21	m
7		John W.	19	m
8		Willis T.	17	m
9		Lewis R.	15	m
10		Margaret Ann	13	f
11		Caleb F.	9	m
12		Amos J.	7	m
13		George W.	5	m
14		Henry Dowd	13	m b

Thomas Grisam household, 1860 census

Thomas Grisham's birthplace on his son Willis Grisham's death certificate<sup>7</sup> is listed as Jones County, North Carolina, so I consulted *Abstracts of the Records of Jones County, North Carolina, 1779-1868*. While a keyword search of the book for "Grisham" revealed no matches, several entries for Thomas Grissom were listed. In 1856, Thomas Grissom of Duplin County bought land from Caleb Bishop, possibly a relative of Thomas's wife Barbary Bishop of Jones County.<sup>8</sup> Another land transaction took place several decades earlier, in 1818, between Thomas Grissom and William Jones.<sup>9</sup> This Thomas was most likely the

3. 1870 US census, Duplin Co., NC, population schedule, Limestone Township, p. 480 (stamped), p. 13 (penned), family 103, Thomas Grissom household.

4. 1860 US census, Duplin Co., NC, population schedule, North Division, p. 50 (penned), family 382, Thomas Grisam household.

5. 1850 US census, Granville Co., NC, population schedule, Fishing Creek, p. 86 (stamped), p. 171 (penned), family 2, Thomas Grisham household.

6. 1850 US census, Duplin Co., NC, population schedule, North Division, p. 170 (penned), family 574, Thomas Gressman household.

7. "North Carolina, U.S., Death Certificates, 1909-1976," database and images, *Ancestry* (<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1121>); Willis T. Grisham, indexed as Willis T. Grishour.

8. Zae Hargett Gwinn, *Abstracts of the Records of Jones County, North Carolina, 1779-1868*, vol. 1 (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1998), 910; searched in FamilySearch Digital Library.

9. Gwinn, *Abstracts of the Records of Jones County, North Carolina, 1779-1868*, vol. 1, p. 564.

father of Thomas Grisham since the Duplin County Thomas wasn't born until 1808.

*The Carolina Federal Republican* newspaper of New Bern, North Carolina, lists people with unpaid taxes from 1816. Thomas Grisham is named as owing taxes for one hundred acres of land on Tuckahoe Creek, Jones County.<sup>10</sup> Finally, the 1810 federal census for North Carolina records Thomas Grissom living in Jones County.<sup>11</sup> This is the earliest source I have found for the Duplin County Gresham family.

A number of variations in the Gresham surname have occurred in the past two centuries. Some may have been due to error on the part of census takers or clerks, while others might have been deliberate. Transcribing and indexing mistakes in genealogy databases increase the difficulty for researchers searching for the right person, but this is where patience and perseverance come into play. These same qualities are needed to correctly identify an ancestor who may have used a variety of given names.

### **Given name variations: the Boeckman family of Nashville, Tennessee**

After my great-grandfather Heinrich Joseph Böckmann immigrated to Tennessee, he used the Americanized name of Henry. He and his wife Louise were the parents of six girls and four boys. I found only two birth records in Ancestry for Boeckman children in Nashville: Ferdinand Bockman born 28 December 1882<sup>12</sup> and a male Boechman born 18 January 1895 with the same parents but no given name.<sup>13</sup>

Ancestry has a typed index of the Nashville births, so I browsed it to look

for surnames broadly resembling Boeckman.<sup>14</sup> I found "Joseph B. Boejmen," son of Henry and Laura "Boehmen" born 13 March 1885, and "Borkman Inf of Henry Borkman Lula Borkman," born 26 April 1892. Returning to the handwritten images of the Nashville birth records, I located both children and verified them as sons of Henry and Louise Boeckman. Records for all four sons but no daughters appear in this database, and two babies had no given names.

Several daughters lived long enough to collect Social Security, so I checked Ancestry's database of Tennessee delayed birth records.<sup>15</sup> It includes two records for the daughters of Henry and Louise Boeckman: Mary Albertena Boeckman born 4 December 1889 and Helen Boeckman born 8 January 1902.

Not finding additional civil records, I turned to church records to verify the names of the remaining daughters. The Catholic church built and attended by German immigrants in Nashville was called the Church of the Assumption. Although I was unable to obtain copies of baptismal records when I visited in 1977, Father Bernard Neidergeses, the pastor, provided me with the names given at baptism for all ten children, as shown in table 1.

Armed with these names and dates, I turned to the 1900 census to track the family. The nine children born by the census date are all listed, but not necessarily with their baptismal names. The oldest daughter was enumerated as Lillian M., not Margaret Elizabeth. The son baptized as Ferdinand in 1882 was now Frank F., and the baby was listed with her second name of Agnes rather than Isidora.<sup>16</sup>



*Henry Boeckman, father of ten children including eight who changed their names (photo provided by author)*

10. *The Carolina Federal Republican*, 17 January 1818, p. 4.

11. 1810 US census, Jones Co., NC, population schedule, p. 259 (penned), Thomas Grissom.

12. "Tennessee, U.S., City Birth Records, 1881-1915," database and images, Ancestry (<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2491>); Ferdinand Bockman, 28 December 1882.

13. "Tennessee, U.S., City Birth Records, 1881-1915," Ancestry (<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2491>); Boechman, 18 January 1895.

14. "Tennessee, U.S., City Birth Records, 1881-1915," database and images, Ancestry (<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2491>); Joseph B. Boejmen, 13 March 1885, and Borkman, 26 April 1892.

15. "Tennessee, U.S., Delayed Birth Records, 1869-1909," database and images, Ancestry (<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2282>); Mary Albertena Boeckman, 4 December 1889, and Helen Boeckman, 8 January 1902.

16. 1900 US census, Davidson Co., TN, population schedule, Nashville, First Ward, ED not shown, p. 9 (stamped), p. 3717 (penned), family 173, Henry Boeckman household.

## ■ REFERENCE DESK

The 1910 census shows that the given names in the family were continuing to evolve. Lillian was Lillie, Catherine was Kate, Herman Joseph was now called Joseph, and Mary Helen was Helen.<sup>17</sup> Isidora Agnes had died in 1901. In an obituary,<sup>18</sup> her name is reported as Izara Agnes Boeckman; her tombstone in Calvary Cemetery is inscribed Ozara Boeckman. Ferdinand (Francis Ferdinand) died in 1908. His tombstone in the same cemetery reads simply Frank Boeckman.

Joseph Bernard had moved to Memphis by 1910 and was using the name Ben B. Boeckman.<sup>19</sup> A 1910 *Nashville Banner* article states that Ben Boeckman was a prominent young businessman in Nashville and had accepted a position with the Grand Union Tea Company in Memphis.<sup>20</sup>

Nashville city directories on Ancestry proved to be valuable sources for verifying names and addresses in a given year. In 1915, Benjamin Boeckman lived at home again, along with Clara, Henry, and Katie. Christine Boeckman was at the same address, working as a clerk. Since Lillian married in 1911 and became Lillian Burns, and Helen was too young to work, Christine must have been Mary Albertena.<sup>21</sup>

<b>Boeckman Benj b 1228 4th av N</b>
“Christine opr b 1228 4th av N
“Clara opr Cumb T & T Co b 1228 4th av N
<b>Boeckman Ferd W bkpr Cain-Sloan Co b 1002 Buchanan</b>
“Henry clk b 1228 4th av N
“Herman H (Katie A) h 1102 Buchanan
“Katie clk b 1228 4th av N
“Louise (wid Jno H) h 1228 4th av N
“Theresa M clk Cain-Sloan Co b 1002 Buchanan
“Zena opr Cumb T & T Co b 1228 4th av N

Nashville city directory, 1915

The 1920 census confirms that Mary Albertena was now called Christine. She, Catherine, Clara, and Helen are listed as daughters living in the family home with their mother Louise. Lily Burns and her husband Robert are enumerated at the same address.<sup>22</sup> Ben (Joseph Bernard) and Joe (Herman Joseph) were both married and living out of state. The remaining brother, Henry, was confined as a patient in the Davidson County Tuberculosis Hospital.<sup>23</sup> He died in March 1920.<sup>24</sup>

BAPTISMAL NAMES AND DATES	LATER NAMES
Margaret Elizabeth, 4 February 1878	Lillian M. (1900), Lillie (1910)
Catherine Alberta, 17 November 1880	Kate (1910)
Francis Ferdinand, 28 December 1882	Frank F. (1900)
Joseph Bernard, 13 March 1885	Benjamin B. (1910)
Clara Elizabeth, 6 June 1887	
Mary Albertena, 4 December 1889	Christine (1915)
Herman Joseph, 28 April 1892	Joseph (1910)
Henry William, 18 January 1895	
Isidora Agnes, 17 January 1899	Agnes (1900)
Mary Helen, 8 January 1902	Helen (1910)

Table 1. Baptismal names and names used later by the Boeckmans, with the year of the first known use

From 1920 forward, the remaining seven offspring of Henry and Louise Boeckman seemed content with their chosen names. Clara Elizabeth was the only one who never varied from her baptismal name. Catherine chose the diminutive of Kate. Helen and Joe consistently used their middle names. Benjamin dropped his first name and Americanized his middle name. His sisters Christine and Lily chose totally different names.

17. 1910 US census, Davidson Co., TN, population schedule, Nashville, First Civil District, ED 13, p. 0951 (penned), family 119, Henry Boeckman household.

18. “Izara Agnes Boeckman, Obituary,” *The Tennessean*, 30 December 1901, p. 4.

19. 1910 US census, Shelby Co., TN, population schedule, Memphis, 4th Ward, ED 116, p. 169 (stamped), p. 2192 (penned), line 8, Ben Van B Boeckman.

20. “Hotel Gossip and Personal Mention,” *Nashville Banner*, 3 March 1910, p. 9.

21. *Nashville City Directory... 1915* (Nashville: Marshall-Bruce-Polk Co., 1915), 125.

22. 1920 US census, Davidson Co., TN, population schedule, Nashville, First Civil District, ED 11, stamped p. 25 (stamped), p. 7717 (penned), family 32, Louise Boeckman household.

23. 1920 US census, Davidson Co., TN, population schedule, Nashville, Civil District 13, ED 130, p. 4731 (penned), line 80, Henry Boeckman.

24. “Henry Anthony Boeckman,” Calvary Cemetery, Nashville, Davidson Co., TN; *Find a Grave*, memorial ID 179847332 (<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/179847332/henry-anthony-boeckman>).

Although the list of baptismal names from the Church of the Assumption was complete, the names given in religious ceremonies are not always the ones individuals use in their daily lives, so they can mislead researchers. If not for the resources now available for research, identifying these siblings would have been a much more difficult task. Nashville had several newspapers which are now digitized and available in commercial databases. The Tennessee State Library and Archives made Nashville city birth and death records available to Ancestry. Finally, federal census records, city directories, and draft registration records provided valuable information.

During a visit to Nashville in the 1980s, I asked my great-aunts Helen and Teenie (Christine) why so many in the family changed their names. The answer was quite simple: they didn't like their original names. My grandfather loved the fact that his three

initials were BBB and had a belt buckle engraved with those letters. Aunt Teenie thought Christine was prettier than Albertena, and Aunt Helen just preferred her middle name.

These individuals were born at home, before the days of strict vital record registration laws and Social Security. It was easy to begin using a preferred name and continue on a daily basis. No legal action was required.

### Conclusion

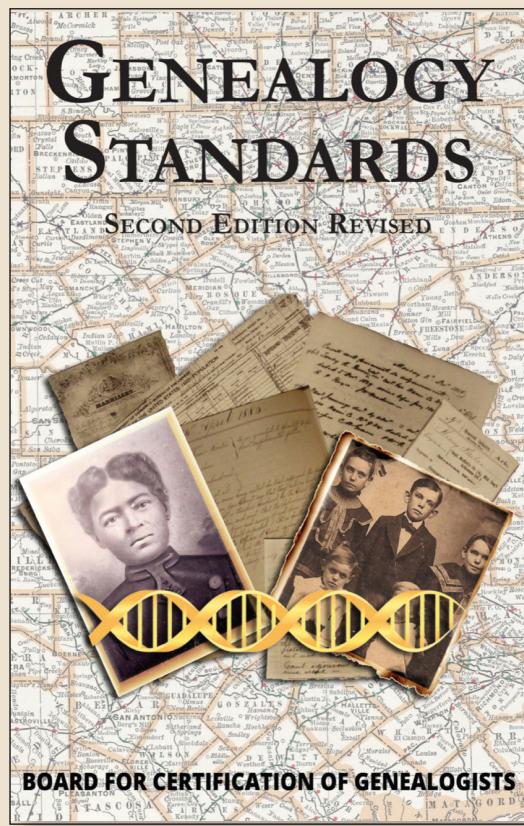
The fluidity of names often proves frustrating to genealogists, but several actions can make it less daunting with more successful outcomes. Try broad searches, reading line by line, and alternative spellings, since even slight changes in spelling could make a difference in results. Always check original images rather than transcriptions, and verify relationships with a variety of resources. 

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# Search Tips and Tricks for FamilySearch

Robert Raymond

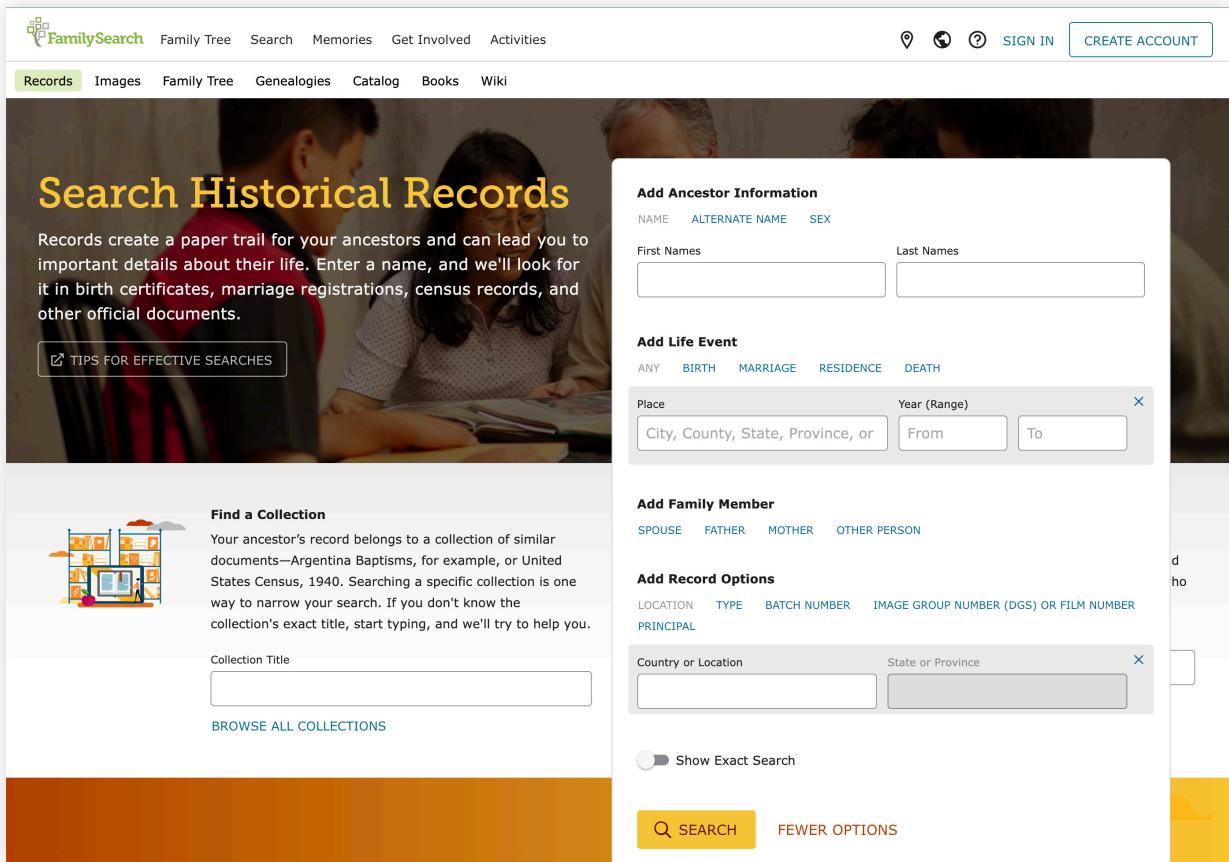


Figure 1. Search Historical Records, with the More Options search screen (FamilySearch)

The FamilySearch.org website contains thirteen billion searchable names from nearly seven billion indexed historical records. Search them at <https://www.familysearch.org>, or click Search at the top of a FamilySearch page and then Records.

With that many records, finding those pertaining to an ancestor might seem daunting. Fortunately, the search system for FamilySearch provides a powerful set of tools. This article will explain their nuances so researchers can maximize their effectiveness. Typing a name, date, and place just scratches the surface, and numerous features can be adapted to conduct a more precise search.

## General tips

### Results improve over time

FamilySearch constantly tweaks and improves the internal workings of the search system, corrects problems in record collections, and adds or fixes place names. Consequently, search results improve over time. Use the Feedback mechanism (a button at the bottom of the search results page) if a change for the worse occurs.

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## The cream rises to the top

Search results are sorted with the best matches at the top. This order is determined by calculating a score for each result. Scores are calculated by comparing the information specified by the user in each field with the information in corresponding fields in each record. The more closely a field matches, the more it adds to the score. So, for example, in a search for David, records with David add more to the score than records with Dave. Knowing the scores is not generally helpful but scores can be seen in downloads.

## More is less and less is more

When searching, more is less and less is more. The more search criteria specified, the fewer search results received. This behavior is illustrated in table 1. Generally, start the search with less criteria and increase until the number of results is reasonable.

SURNAME	GIVEN NAMES	DEATH YEAR	DEATH PLACE	# RESULTS
Raymond				3,470,132
Raymond	George Lansing			265,879
Raymond	George Lansing	1929		89,351
Raymond	George Lansing	1929	Washington, D.C.	4,112

Table 1. Fewer results with more parameters

## Exact option

Use the Exact option to match a parameter exactly. To enable the Exact option for a field, check the box next to it. If Exact boxes aren't visible, scroll to the bottom and flip the Show Exact Search switch, shown in figure 1 above the Search button. This action displays the boxes; they still have to be checked.

Continuing the example in table 1, clicking Exact boxes decreases the number of results more dramatically.

SURNAME	GIVEN NAMES	DEATH YEAR	DEATH PLACE	# RESULTS
Raymond <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	George Lansing	1929	Washington, D.C.	3,207
Raymond <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	George Lansing	1929	Washington, D.C. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1

Table 2. Effects of Exact option

Some search behaviors are unaffected by the Exact box. Diacritics, capitalization, certain punctuation, and prefix spaces are always ignored. Thus, González matches Gonzalez; Gonzalez matches

gonzalez; D'Angelo matches DAngelo and dangelo; and Mc Donald matches McDonald. In hyphenated names, a hyphen matches a space: Newton-John matches Newton John.

There is no Exact box for dates. However, the score is boosted if the date in a result falls within the specified range.

## Iterate parameters

Start sparsely and iterate, iterate, iterate. One of the parameters might be wrong or missing from the record; drop each parameter in turn. Add parameters only when necessary to cut the number of results.

Start with a name. Add a minimal set of relatives.

Drop the relatives and add facts about the individual. When all else fails, drop the name, in whole or in part, and concentrate on a locality.

## People, not records

Results are *people*, not *records*.

Or more exactly, the search system returns records that *mention* a person, even if the individual is not the focus of the record. For example, a search for Alonzo Raymond married to Clarinda might return the death certificate of Louisa Raymond Cooper. She

was their daughter and her death certificate mentions Alonzo and Clarinda as parents. To disable this behavior and search only for principal people, select the Principal option under Add Record Options.

## Events

### Event-like

Some events are *like* others. For example, burial, cremation, and obituary events are all associated with death and generally occur close in time to each other.

Use the death fields to specify any death-*like* event. Whether entering burial information to find death records, or death information to find burial records, use the death fields.

The same is true for birth-like events (adoption, baptism, birth, birth registration, christening) and marriage-like events (banns, engagement, license, marriage, registration). This convention is used to make it easier to find records,

without making the interface too complex. It doesn't mean that a marriage is guaranteed to have occurred after an engagement. It doesn't mean the person had to be baptized as a child. This behavior is merely a finding aid.

## Residence and Any events

Use the Residence event to specify census places and enumeration years. Residence events are also used for Freedmen's Bureau records and sometimes for business directories.

Use the Any event to specify events other than birth, marriage, residence, and death. Other types include apprenticeship, court, divorce, draft registration, employment, immigration, and imprisonment, among many others.

## Collection-specific events

Some event fields are only available when searching individual collections. For example, "United States World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918" has a draft registration event and "United States Civil War and Later Pension Index, 1861-1917" has a pension event.

## Event type versus record type

The event type can differ from the record type. For example, death records often contain both death events and birth events. Specify record type by clicking Type in the Add Record Options section of the search form.

## Places

### Specify placenames unambiguously

The search system interprets place names as best it can. For example, the system interprets "Chicago, IL" as "Chicago, Cook, Illinois, United States." Specify "The Big Apple," and the system gives results for New York City.

However, it is best to specify places unambiguously. Include the US state or international country. Specifying just "St. Louis" might retrieve results for Saint-Louis, Senegal.

The search system does not consider the context of the collection. For example, specifying "Washington County" when searching "Oregon Death Index, 1903-1998" returns no results. But specifying "Washington County, Oregon" works correctly.

## For two places, more is more

There is an exception to the "more is less" behavior. Specifying two locations makes either one optional.

For example, the first three rows of table 3 show that as more information is specified, less results are returned. But when a second location is added in the last row, instead of decreasing, the number of results *increases*.

SURNAME	GIVEN NAMES	BIRTH PLACE	DEATH PLACE	# RESULTS
Raymond				3,499,010
Raymond	Alonzo			230,666
Raymond	Alonzo	Vermont		5,553
Raymond	Alonzo	Vermont	Utah	5,755

Table 3. More results by specifying two locations

## Missing locations

There is a special case for missing locations. If a user specifies an event location, but the record collection doesn't include locations for that event-type, the search system can match records that include the same location for a different event. For example, a search for Alonzo Raymond, born in Utah, will match a death record that specifies a Utah death location, but no birth location. The search system assumes that because he died in Utah, he might have been born there also. To disable this behavior, select the Exact box.

## Event location versus record location

There is a difference between an event location and a record location. The event location is where the event happened, and the record location is where the event was recorded. For example, many foreign births are recorded in the US census. Either or both locations may be specified. Specify record location in the Add Record Options section at the bottom of the search form.

## Names

### Alternate Name field

Use the Alternate Name field to search simultaneously for a name and an alternate name, such as Muhammad Ali and Cassius Clay, or Michelle Obama and Michelle Robinson (her maiden name).

## Women with unknown names

If a woman's name is unknown, use other identifying information. Specify her married last name. Specify her spouse. If necessary, specify a couple of family members, such as spouse and oldest child, or two youngest children.

For example, an obituary for George Lansing Raymond identifies his survivors as "his daughter, Mrs. Tyler Dennett, wife of Dr. Dennett, ... and four grandchildren, George Raymond Dennett, Tyler Eugene Dennett, Audrey Dennett and Lawrence Dennett."<sup>1</sup> A search for his daughter with first name blank, last name Dennett, spouse Tyler Dennett, and other persons Audrey and Lawrence, identifies Mrs. Dennett's first name: Mayselle or Maybelle.

## Wildcards

Use wildcards to specify uncertain or inconsistently spelled names. A question mark (?) matches any one character and an asterisk (\*) matches any number of characters. For example, Mrs. Dennett's first name was either Mayselle or Maybelle. A search for May?elle Dennett with spouse Tyler Dennett finds records showing Maybelle is correct.

To match Mabelle, use the asterisk's ability to match zero characters. Ma\*elle will match Mabelle in addition to Maybelle and Mayselle. Be careful; it also matches Marielle and Mademoiselle. Things can get out of control if too few regular characters are present. Ma\*el\* matches desirable spellings, like Mabel, Mabelle, Maybelle, Maybell, and Mayselle, but it also matches Madeleine, Manuel, Marcel, Mariel, Martel, and Maxwell.

## Name equivalents

The search system knows about many name equivalents, including alternate spellings, nicknames, and translations. For example, a search for Mable Dennett with alternate name Mable Raymond, born in Pennsylvania from 1881 to 1886, finds Maybelle spelled Mable, Maybel, and Maybelle.

The system does not know about all name equivalents. For example, it does not know that Maddie or Tilly are nicknames for Matilda, but it does know that Jim is a nickname for James and Giovanni is equivalent to John. If in doubt, add alternate names (at the top of the search screen).

## Misindexed names

Leave out names to find grossly misindexed names. For example, a search for Lavina Shields in the 1870 US census does not return her record (misindexed as Lassara Shields) unless First Name is left blank.

## Search for families

Find multiple children in a single search by leaving the name field blank and specifying parents' names. For example, a search for birthplace Norris Bank, Lancashire, England, with father's name Robert Rayment and mother's name Clara, returns seven children born between 1900 and 1916.

## Specifying children

Use the Other Persons field under Add Family Member to specify children.

## Exact ordering of names

When the Exact box is checked, the search system will match names exactly as specified, including name order for multiple given or family names. For example, partway through her life Nanny Ellen Rhodes, born 1918 in Texas, swapped her first and middle names. A search for Nanny Ellen Rhodes, without Exact checked, returns records with the names in either order. If Exact is checked, the search returns names for Nanny Ellen only. When Exact is not checked, names matching the specified order are scored higher.

## Dates

### Interpretation of date ranges

Many search systems use a year +/- paradigm. If just one year is specified, the FamilySearch system searches a range plus or minus five years. The closer the year matches, the higher the score.

Specifying a range is more effective. For example, to look for missing children in a family born between two other children, specify the parents' names and set the birth year range to match the gap between the two children.

When searching a range of eleven years or less, the closer a record matches the middle year of the range, the higher the score. The further from the middle, the lower the score. For ranges longer than eleven years, the score is the same for any year in the range.

1. "Prof. G. L. Raymond Called by Death," *The Evening Star* (Washington, DC), 12 July 1929, p. 9.

Record years outside the range contribute nothing to the score.

## Reasonable date ranges

Even when an open-ended range is desired, specify a reasonable end of range to improve scoring. For example, to look for a marriage record when the year is unknown, specify an end year equal to the year of the birth of the first known child. Then specify a reasonable start year based on what is known about the marriage and the couple.

As another example, to look for a death record when the year is unknown, specify a start year equal to the last year the person was known to be alive. Rather than leave the end year open, specify the first year the person was known to be dead, or some reasonable end year based on what is known about the person.

## Inferred dates

There is a special case for missing dates. If a user specifies an event date and a record does not have the event, the specified event date is inferred

from other dates in the record. Consequently, the search system may return records that do not include the information specified. For example, in an exact search for Alonzo Pearis Raymond as the record principal, with a marriage range of 1842 to 1850, the system returns seven records, none of which specify a marriage. However, all specify a birth date consistent with a marriage in that date range.

## Filters

Searching takes the search parameters, queries the billions of records in the historical record collections, and returns a set of results. Filtering works within those results. It provides a more precise tool for cutting down the number of results. The gray bubbles in a row above the search results are filters, as shown in figure 2.

### Filter by event place or year

Select an event (birth, marriage, death, other, or residence) and filter by date or place. Numbers following a value indicate the number of matching results. Dates can be filtered to a century or decade.

Places can be filtered to a world area, a country, a sub-country jurisdiction, and sometimes another, smaller jurisdiction.

### Filter by race

Filtering by race is a useful way to find records for which race was recorded and indexed. The race filter counts the number of times each racial designation occurs in the result set and presents a list of the top

The screenshot shows a search results page for 'Alonzo Pearis Raymond'. At the top, there are several filter buttons: Collection, Sex, Race, Birth, Marriage, Death, Other, and Residence. Below these, a 'PREFERENCES' button and a 'SEARCH' bar are visible. A large modal window titled 'Search' is open, containing 'Add Ancestor Information' fields for NAME, ALTERNATE NAME, and SEX, with 'First Names' entered. The 'RESIDENCE PLACE' section is active, showing a grid of location filters with counts: Africa (38), Asia & Middle East (36), Australia & New Zealand (63), Canada (530), Caribbean and Central America (403), Continental Europe (643), Irregular (1,163), Mexico (43), Other (59), Pacific Islands (11), South America (171), United Kingdom and Ireland (1,011), and United States of America (54,348). To the right, 'RESIDENCE YEAR (RANGE)' and 'OTHER PERSON' sections are partially visible. At the bottom of the modal are 'CANCEL' and 'APPLY' buttons. The main search results table lists various records for Alonzo Pearis Raymond, including his burial in Salt Lake City, birth in 1821, and membership in the Early Church. Each record has edit and delete icons. The 'RESIDENCE' column is highlighted, indicating it is the current filter applied.

Figure 2. Filters are the gray bubbles located just above the column headings.

twenty. (Inappropriate values in the race field are displayed as in the original record and are not endorsed or condoned by FamilySearch.)

Definitions of race vary over place, time, record type, and other factors, such as categorization of multiracial individuals.

Consequently, different records can specify different races for the same person. Be careful with abbreviations, as the same abbreviation can mean different things in different contexts. “B” might mean *black* in Georgia and *white* (*blanco*) in Puerto Rico. In the 1950 census, “C” is sometimes used for *Neg*, *Chi*, *Cajun*, *Costa Rican*, or *Cuban*.

The race filter allows selection of multiple values. Finding African Americans might require selecting African American, B, Bl, Black, Col, Colored, M, N, and more.

Values available in the filter represent only the values in the search results. Race was not recorded on some records, and even when present FamilySearch did not always index it.

### Filtering by collection

Filtering by collection is a powerful tool. Focus on one collection or a key set pertaining to the research objective. Select collections of a particular type, such as census, or birth, marriage, and death. Narrow the search to those collections with a given keyword, like “Catholic,” in the title. Use the Collection filter to see how many results are in each collection. Sort each type’s collection list alphabetically or by number of results.

## Collections

### The All Collections list

Use the All Collections list to access single collections. Click Search > Records > Browse All Collections. Filter the list by title words, collection type, or place. Click a collection title to search just that collection.

Use the All Collections list, shown in figure 3, to check for new or updated collections. It indicates

Collection Title	Records & Last Updated
Zimbabwe, Archdiocese of Bulawayo, Catholic Church Records, 1896-2022	2,126 6 September 2023
Germany, North Rhine-Westphalia, Wuppertal, Civil Registration, 1810-1930	57,162 6 September 2023
Argentina, Jujuy, Catholic Church Records, 1662-1975	192,420 6 September 2023

Figure 3. All Collections list, sorted in update order

when each collection was published or updated. Sort the list to see what is recent. Click the Last Updated header until the most recent dates are at the top. To sort alphabetically, click the Collection Title header.

### Collection-specific fields

Utilize collection-specific fields. In a search of a single collection, additional search fields may be available. For example, some US censuses include fields to search by race or relationship to head of household.

### 1950 census Keyword field

Use the 1950 United States census Keyword field to search for marital status, occupation, or industry. If multiple words are specified, only one must be found.

### Searching images of unindexed records

Not all records have been indexed and placed into collections. FamilySearch is acquiring images faster than they are indexed. Searching images takes more effort but opens up many more records. (See Robert Raymond, “Explore Historical Images on FamilySearch,” *NGS Magazine*, October–December 2020, 28–33.)

## Conclusion

Understanding the FamilySearch search system and its nuances is key to maximizing effectiveness. This article has addressed several aspects: exceptions to general rules, unexpected behaviors, and ways of increasing the precision of searches. Strategic use of the FamilySearch search system can bring to light records of ancestors that might otherwise have been overlooked.



# Understanding and Using DNA Test Results



## An Online Course from the National Genealogical Society

Taking a DNA test is easy. Understanding the results and knowing how to use the data to identify your ancestors is more challenging.

The National Genealogical Society (NGS)—a leader in genealogy education—now offers family historians a new online course, *Understanding and Using DNA Test Results*.

In an easy-to-follow, step-by-step format, expert genetic genealogist, Angie Bush, MS, teaches basic patterns of genetic inheritance and how DNA matches can help build your family tree.

The course explains the basic types of DNA tests and the value and limitations of their results; how to read and interpret DNA charts and cousin match pages; how to apply test results to traditional genealogical research; and much more.

Enroll today and enjoy learning at your own pace, in your own home, on any tablet or computer.

NGS also offers an excellent compliment to this course with its book *Genetic Genealogy in Practice* that delves into even more detail on learning to use DNA in your family history research.

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# The Importance of Local Historical Societies in Genealogical Research

Massachusetts Historical Society *Founded 1791*

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## MHS FEATURES



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COLLECTIONS

Massachusetts Historical Society (<https://www.masshist.org>)

A valuable but sometimes overlooked repository for genealogical inquiries is the local historical society. The first in the United States was the Historical Society (now known as the Massachusetts Historical Society), founded in 1791 to gather records for the study of American history.<sup>1</sup> Since then, thousands of historical societies have been established on national, state, county, and town levels, and family historians can benefit from using them for genealogical research.

Historical societies and genealogical societies have a symbiotic relationship. A genealogical society primarily concentrates on the ancestry of individuals and their families, while a historical society is “an organization that seeks to preserve and promote interest in the history of a region, a period, or a subject.”<sup>2</sup> In some localities, historical societies provide both functions due to the lack of a genealogical society or the interests of their members.

Websites cited in this article were viewed on 25 July 2023.

1. “The Founding,” Massachusetts Historical Society (<https://www.masshist.org/about>).
2. Search for term “historical society,” Dictionary of Archives Terminology, *Society of American Archivists* (<https://dictionary.archivists.org>).

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**Cara Jones, CG**, is a Southern California native who loves exploring old cemeteries. Working as a professional genealogist since 2001, she holds a bachelor’s degree in family history, a master’s degree in American history, and a Certified Genealogist credential. Cara is experienced with all US research, and her area of specialty is the Mid-Atlantic region. She is also a skilled genealogical speaker and educator.

Local historical societies collect and preserve the history of a community, provide research guidance and record access, and facilitate the interpretation and promotion of the area's historical aspects. This article explores the benefits and practicalities of using local historical societies for genealogical research.

### Collect and preserve history

Some record collections in local historical societies are duplicates and can be accessed in another repository, while others are exclusive collections not available elsewhere. For example, a town's original death register book may be accessible in the organization's research library and in digital format online. However, members of the society may have combed through the town's newspaper to compile a list of marriage announcements that is only available at its research library.

Unique records of a local historical society, such as family bibles, may have originated from the private donations of individuals gifting their family records and heirlooms to ensure preservation. One-of-a-kind record collections like oral histories are gathered by interviewing residents of a specific location or concerning a particular event (like a pandemic or war). These interviews may provide community characteristics or familial details not found elsewhere. Moreover, many local historical societies help preserve family history with digitization tools, such as flatbed scanners, slide scanners, and VHS tape conversion.

In addition to record acquisition, local historical societies preserve their communities' architectural structures and artifacts. The Western Reserve Historical Society of Cleveland, Ohio, has preserved several historical properties including the Hale Farm and Village, which "consists of 32 historic buildings. Period crafts are made on the premises... Each building welcomes you to catch a glimpse of life in the 1860s and shares its past with you first hand."<sup>3</sup>

Preserving these aspects of history encourages a better understanding of the past.

Physical artifacts provide tangible examples to place an individual in historical context. Viewing items such as letters, telegrams, photos, journals, or an old military uniform can transport a researcher's perceptions to another time. Awareness of the period's economic, political, religious, and social events can influence a genealogist's research approach.

The Richardson County Historical Society in Falls City, Nebraska, illustrates the value of collecting, preserving, and educating others about the significance of historical artifacts unique to the small farming community. Its Fall 2022 newsletter includes a section on historical artifacts recently acquired by the organization.<sup>4</sup> An article highlights each artifact with a photo, a brief description of its features, the original owner, the purpose and place used, and the donor. From this profile, genealogists can glean information applicable to their research about the community and its residents:

1952 John Deere 60. An example of the two-cylinder tractors called "Johnny Poppers" because of their distinctive exhaust sound. Donation from the family of Gale H. Marsh who farmed on the Big Nemaha River bottoms southeast of Salem starting in the 1950s. We also received two small feed grinders from his family. A son-in-law, John McBride, provided funds for the transportation, cleanup, and display signage of the items.



1952 John Deere 60 tractor (Richardson County Historical Society)

3. "Historic Properties & Buildings," Western Reserve Historical Society (<https://www.wrhs.org/historic-properties>).

4. "New in the AG II Building," Newsletter Richardson County Historical Society, Inc. no. 36 (Fall 2022): p. 2; digital image, *The Richardson County Historical Society* (<https://sites.rootsweb.com/~nericcchs>).

## Provide research guidance and record access

Most local historical societies maintain an onsite repository and offer several ways to understand and retrieve information from their collections. Research guidance typically depends on the size and funding of the organization. The most desirable method is to visit in person. Research guides, collection summaries, and inquiry forms may be available online for local historical societies that maintain websites. Smaller societies frequently provide research assistance through email inquiries or phone calls.

Regardless of size or manner of contact, the best way to understand a society's collections and resources is to make use of the knowledge and expertise of its staff. Employees and volunteers, often long-time members of the community, are familiar with local record collections and can be very well-informed about the history of an area, community dynamics, and physical places of importance. Those who work at local historical societies are often

passionate about history and eager to assist others in their research.

Collections exclusive to a local historical society may include databases created from local records (like court and probate records), family files and bibles, community telephone books and directories, magazines and newspapers (often including obituary indexes), local and regional history books, yearbook and photograph collections, and historical maps. Many societies subscribe to genealogy websites that can be accessed onsite at no charge.

The History Center of York County, Pennsylvania, a community with colonial roots, features a library and archives.<sup>5</sup> It maintains a detailed website with many of the tools useful to genealogists such as finding aids, databases, and online research requests.

## Facilitate the interpretation and promotion of history

Local historical societies help people understand a community's history and appreciate the experiences of individuals within that community. Skilled genealogists recognize the importance of identifying historical events and influential undercurrents in the lives of the families they are researching. As Elizabeth Shown Mills emphasized in a lecture, context is the "fabric of ancestral lives."<sup>6</sup> When a genealogist places a research subject in historical context, new clues, sources, and methods can emerge to help guide research.

Local historical societies encourage information-sharing through knowledgeable staff, one-of-a-kind collections, museum exhibits, preservation projects, publications, and lectures. Visiting a local historical society often includes encounters with like-minded people meaningfully invested in research.

Park City, Utah, an old mining town turned ski haven in the Rocky Mountains, has a robust historical society with a multifaceted emphasis on historical education, in the form of community outreach.<sup>7</sup> The Park City Museum has permanent and rotating exhibits, a free community lecture series, walking

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## ABOUT THE RESEARCH LIBRARY & ARCHIVES

The York County History Center's Library & Archives houses an extensive and varied collection covering a wide range of topics, including genealogy and family history, local history, decorative arts, community organizations and historic sites, arts and entertainment, and military history.

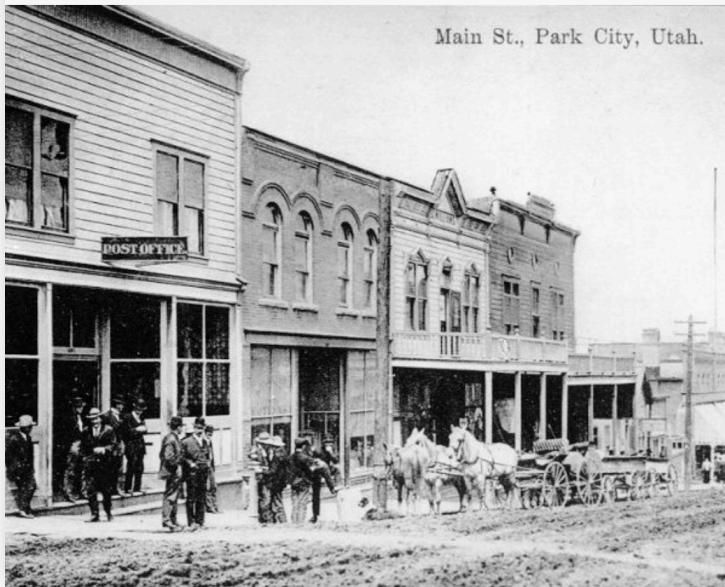
York County History Center Library and Archives (<https://www.yorkhistorycenter.org/library>)

5. York County History Center (<https://www.yorkhistorycenter.org>).

6. Scott Wilds, "Elizabeth Shown Mills—Context: A Powerful Tool for Problem-Solving," 27 July 2019, Board for Certification of Genealogists (<https://bcgcertification.org/shown-mills-skillbuild-nogs-2019>).

7. "Guided Summer Walking Tours," Park City Museum (<https://parkcityhistory.org/summer-walking-tours>).

# Guided Summer Walking Tours



## Explore the History of Park City's Main Street

Put on your walking shoes and explore Historic Main Street! Learn the architecture, people, and notable events of Park City's unique history, from the mining boom town to world class ski destination.

Guided Main Street tours in 2023 will be offered Monday through Friday June 26th through September 1st at 2 p.m.

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Park City Museum's Guided Summer Walking Tours (<https://parkcityhistory.org/summer-walking-tours>)

tours, and a weekly history column in the local newspaper, *The Park Record*.

### Identifying local historical societies and preparing for a visit

Finding a local historical society in a specific geographic area can be accomplished in numerous ways. A Google search will likely identify a town or county's historical society. Contact a neighboring society, public library, or government office to inquire further if multiple search terms don't identify the desired information. Local historical organizations are familiar with one another and can provide insight.

Another approach to uncovering a local historical society is the FamilySearch Research Wiki, an online genealogy resource guide organized geographically ([https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Main\\_Page](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Main_Page)). The content on a state or county's wiki page includes a list of local research facilities and societies. Information in these sections typically consists of a brief description of the organization, a website or social media link, and contact information.

Plan ahead if visiting a local historical society in person is an option, as contacting the organization before a visit is essential. A visit is more likely to be

successful if the following details are clarified: days and hours of operation, forms of payment accepted, facility/research room rules, policy for making copies (paper or electronic), and Wi-Fi availability. Some societies have consistent operating hours, but others are open by appointment only.

Communicating with staff to place a record request beforehand ensures the desired documents can be viewed on the day of the visit. The effectiveness of the visit increases exponentially by calling in advance to discuss the goal of the visit with an experienced staff member and identify pertinent records in the repository to aid the research objective.

### Conclusion

Utilizing the unique collections and vast knowledge of staff at a local historical society is an invaluable resource for a genealogist. Local historical societies gather and protect valuable remnants of the past, provide educational resources, ensure the availability of record collections, and encourage the understanding and celebration of local history. If a local historical society can assist in personal research, support its good works with a word of thanks and a monetary donation. 

# DNA Analysis, Annotations, and Citations

The Genealogical Proof Standard outlines five components necessary for achieving genealogical proof:<sup>1</sup>

- Reasonably exhaustive research
- Complete and accurate source citations
- Critical tests of relevant evidence through processes of analysis and correlation
- Resolution of conflicting evidence
- Soundly reasoned, coherently written conclusions

In all forms of genealogical investigation, researchers must balance in-depth analysis of individual documents with broader correlation, analysis, and resolution of conflicts between evidence items. In the context of genetic genealogy, researchers frequently must balance in-depth analysis of individual DNA matches of a test subject with broader evaluation of patterns that emerge through consideration of larger pools and groups of DNA matches.

Annotation tools provided by DNA testing companies can support broader analysis efforts, but more advanced analysis and correlation benefits from citations of DNA matches and discussion of DNA evidence in research logs and written reports. Here we explore both approaches.

## What to annotate and record

When analyzing a DNA match, what elements are important to note or remember? What details might link with information from other matches to underpin the formation of a proof argument? DNA match analysis might include some of the following elements, which have been discussed in previous issues of this column:

- recognition of shared ancestral surnames, ancestral localities, or common ancestors in match profiles and attached family trees<sup>2</sup>
- exploration of ethnicity admixture summaries for a DNA match and how that correlates with their family tree or the potential source of shared DNA with a tester<sup>3</sup>
- categorization of relationships based on the presence or lack

1. Board for Certification of Genealogists, *Genealogy Standards*, 2nd edition (Nashville, TN: Ancestry.com, 2019), 2-3.

2. Paul Woodbury, "Foundations for Genetic Genealogy Success: Profiles and Family Trees," *NGS Magazine* 46 (October-December 2020), 61.

3. Paul Woodbury, "Introduction to Ethnicity Admixture," *NGS Magazine* 47 (July-September 2021), 55; and Paul Woodbury, "Using Ethnicity Estimates to Generate Genealogical Hypotheses," *NGS Magazine* 47 (October-December 2021), 61.

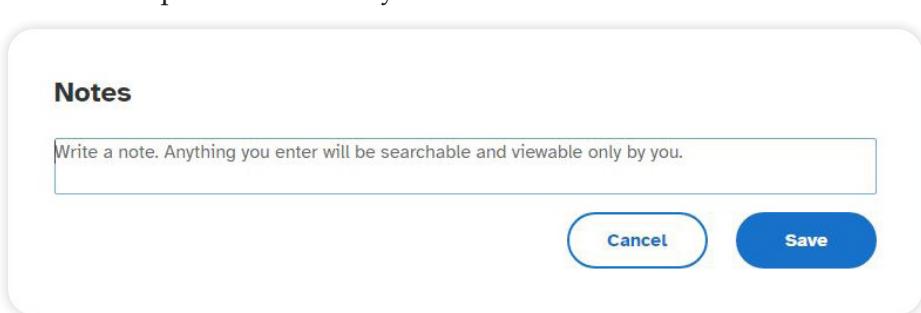


Figure 1. At 23andMe, notes can be added by scrolling to the bottom of a match's profile.

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## DNA DISCOVERY

- of shared match relationships with close genetic cousins<sup>4</sup>
- discussion of any hypothesized cases of misattributed parentage for a tester or their matches<sup>5</sup>
- description of an exact genealogical relationship, and clarification of the generational linkages between a match and their common ancestors with a test subject, perhaps through links to a chart<sup>6</sup>
- evaluation of amounts of total shared DNA and likely relationship levels based on genealogical context<sup>7</sup>
- consideration of clusters of shared matches<sup>8</sup>
- documentation of correspondence and collaboration efforts<sup>9</sup>
- explanation of research efforts to identify a match, extend their family tree, and determine the nature of their relationship<sup>10</sup>
- correlation of segment data, Y-DNA, mtDNA, and X-DNA evidence
- identification of pertinent document evidence that clarifies genetic relationships

These and other details are important elements to consider when annotating DNA matches and when correlating that information and evidence with other DNA matches, in order to build a proof argument dealing with genetic relationships.

The screenshot shows a match profile for "Woodbury and Paul Woodbury". The profile includes a large blue circle with the letters "KW", a small circular photo of a man, and the text "Son | Both sides 50% shared DNA: 3,453 cM across 30 segments". Below the profile are buttons for "Connect to tree", "Message", "Edit Relationship", "Add to group", and "Add note" (which is outlined in red). To the right is a "Notes" section with a text input field containing "Type note here...".

Figure 2. At AncestryDNA, notes can be added by clicking on the Add Note link in the header of the match profile (outlined in red).

### Company annotation tools

Each company provides built-in notetaking features for DNA matches that can associate analysis of a DNA match directly with their profile in the matching database. These notes are viewable only by the tester or administrator of the test and not by the match.

23andMe has a dedicated notes section at the very bottom of each match profile, as shown in figure 1.

At AncestryDNA, researchers can add notes to their matches using a corresponding Add Note link in the header of a match's profile (underneath the buttons to connect to tree, message, or edit relationship, and beside the Add to Group link). Figure 2 shows an example.

The screenshot shows a match profile for "Mr. Paul Alan Woodbury". It includes tabs for "PROFILE" and "NOTES" (which is outlined in red). The notes section displays the message "No notes have currently been entered." There is also a text box icon in the top right corner of the notes area. Other sections include "Ancestral Surnames", "Haplogroup", "Relationship Range", "Shared DNA", "Longest Block", and "X Match". A note at the bottom right says "Match date: May 15 2021".

Figure 3. At FamilyTreeDNA, notes can be added by clicking on the text box icon in the match list (outlined in red). Notes are then recorded in a corresponding pop-up window.

4. Paul Woodbury, "The Closest Autosomal DNA Matches," *NGS Magazine* 48 (January-March 2022), 57.
5. Paul Woodbury, "Broken Branches: Detecting Cases of Misattributed Parentage with DNA Evidence," *NGS Magazine* 48 (April-June 2022), 60.
6. Paul Woodbury, "Charts and Diagrams for Genetic Genealogy: Organization, Analysis, and Reports," *NGS Magazine* 48 (July-September 2022), 60.
7. Paul Woodbury, "Tools for Evaluating Total Shared Centimorgans," *NGS Magazine* 48 (October-December 2022), 61.
8. Paul Woodbury, "Working with Shared Matches," *NGS Magazine* 49 (January-March 2023), 57.
9. Paul Woodbury, "Five Tips for Contacting Genetic Cousins," *NGS Magazine* 49 (April-June 2023), 51.
10. Paul Woodbury, "Considering Every Clue in Identification of Mystery Matches," *NGS Magazine* 49 (July-September 2023), 51.

Figure 4. At MyHeritage, notes can be added by clicking on the text box icon on the far left of each match's card in the match list (outlined in red).

Notes at FamilyTreeDNA are added by clicking on a text box icon on the far right of each match card in the main match list (see figure 3).

MyHeritage's note field is accessed through a text box icon on the far left of each match card in the match list, as shown in figure 4. This same icon can be accessed on the far right of the Review DNA Match page.

Annotating matches in the company interfaces can link a match with a corresponding analysis and research history, but these notes can be difficult to navigate since they are generally not searchable (with the exception of 23andMe). Further, if a match decides to opt out of DNA matching, or delete their kit, their record and any associated notes and analysis will be removed from the company system.

While annotating in a company system may work for some straightforward analyses and correlations, it can be cumbersome for more challenging and complex cases. Analyzing DNA matches in a separate stand-alone document is often more effective for advanced research. However, in those cases, it is important to also properly cite and document DNA matches.

## DNA citations

Citations for DNA matches include the same elements as citations for other forms of documentary evidence: who, what, when, where, and wherein.<sup>11</sup>

**Who created the record?** In the case of DNA matches, the creators of the record are the companies that perform DNA analysis (23andMe, AncestryDNA, Family Tree DNA, MyHeritage, and others).

**What is the record?** Most often, information about DNA matches is obtained from reports or

databases within the larger company dataset. For example, at 23andMe, DNA matches are presented as part of the DNA Relatives section of the website. This citation element also includes the name of the DNA tester.

**When was the source created, published, last modified, or accessed?** When citing DNA matches, researchers most often cite the date that the match profile and its contents was accessed.

**Where is the source?** The location of a DNA match profile is described by the URL of the DNA testing company.

**Wherein?** Specific information cited about a DNA match should aid in finding that match again but should also include information that supports the evidentiary analysis of that source. Details would most likely include the name and kit manager of the genetic cousin, the amount of shared DNA and estimated relationship (for autosomal DNA), or the genetic distance or haplogroup (for Y-DNA and mtDNA). Other information that might be incorporated into a citation include profile details, ethnicity admixture comparisons, attached family tree information, or chromosome segment data.

Examples of autosomal DNA match citations from several companies follow:

“DNA Relatives,” Paul Woodbury, match with George Woodbury, sharing 13 percent DNA (967 cM); 23andMe (<https://you.23andme.com> : accessed 23 August 2023).

“Paul Woodbury’s DNA Matches,” match with J. J. managed by Rulon Higgenbotham, sharing 200 cM; AncestryDNA (<https://ancestry.com> : accessed 23 August 2023).

11. Board for Certification of Genealogists, *Genealogy Standards*, 7.

## DNA DISCOVERY

"Family Finder – Matches," Paul Woodbury (kit 282828), match with Jemima Kelly, sharing 320 cM; *FamilyTreeDNA* (<https://familytreedna.com> : accessed 23 August 2023).

"Paul Woodbury's DNA Matches," match with Harry Harris, sharing 60 cM; *MyHeritage DNA* (<https://myheritage.com> : accessed 23 August 2023).

Given the formulaic elements of DNA match citations, and given that many of the elements of these citations are available by download from the DNA testing companies, some researchers find it helpful to create automated citation templates. Spreadsheet software (like Excel or Google Sheets) can accept the input of a company download of match information and automatically construct citations for all of a tester's DNA matches, using formulas to combine the elements of the citation.

### Research logs and reports

Once cited, information regarding key DNA matches in the form of written analysis, downloaded information, or even screenshots might be recorded in research logs, reports, and document files. Thus, DNA match information and associated evidence can be preserved regardless of the later choices of DNA matches in adjusting their matching preferences or deleting a kit altogether.

Research logs are typically formatted as tables with columns for citations, descriptions of items being

searched, analysis of evidence items (or lack thereof), mention of dates when a search was performed, and numbering of associated documents. Figure 5 shows an example.

Document files for genetic genealogy often include documentary evidence supporting generational linkages between a tester and key matches, but also might include screenshots of important genetic reports.

Genetic genealogy reports often incorporate citations, charts, and correlation of evidence items for the construction of a proof argument regarding biological relationships.

As researchers write in research logs or research reports and incorporate DNA evidence, they often discover that the very act of writing about DNA matches clarifies the strength or weakness of the evidence, gaps in information, and possibilities for research avenues to pursue. It is often in the act of writing about DNA evidence that the complete picture of a genetic scenario becomes apparent.

At the same time, by documenting genetic genealogy research efforts, citing DNA evidence, analyzing, correlating, resolving conflicts, and writing conclusions based on the underlying evidence, it is possible to incorporate DNA evidence as part of genealogical proof. 

Research Log				
Ancestor's name				
Objective(s)				Locality
Date of search	Location/ call number	Description of source (author, title, year, pages)	Comments (purpose of search, results, years and names searched)	Doc. number

Figure 5. Research logs often include the date of a search, a citation, commentary on the search, and document numbers (DiltsGD, "Log15," <https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/File:Log15.png>)

# Translation Tools

Genealogists trying to determine if a document is relevant to their search or pick out relevant facts (such as date and parents in a birth register) have many free tools at their disposal, including word lists, keyboards, and online translation apps. However, genealogists working on dual citizenship, naturalization, and other legal matters involving foreign languages undoubtedly will need the services of a human professional translator.

## Word lists

A word list is exactly that—a list of English words with their foreign counterparts. A word list works well if only a few words need to be identified, such as column headings. FamilySearch has published genealogical word lists for thirty-four different languages. See [https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Genealogical\\_Word\\_Lists](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Genealogical_Word_Lists). The Research Wiki articles for the various languages feature valuable resources for non-speakers. For example, the wiki page for the Polish word list reviews the alphabet, provides links to other word lists and dictionaries, and discusses Polish grammar.

Other online word lists can be located by searching Google with the phrases [*name of language*] (word list OR vocabulary list). Do not include the brackets but do type the parentheses. These general language vocabularies may not contain the genealogical terms commonly encountered by researchers.

## Online translation services

Online translation services are best used for translating longer passages of text, such as letters and newspaper articles. While an online service will not produce a perfect translation, it can give context for the genealogist or at least a general idea of what the document is about.

Online translation apps include Bing Microsoft Translator, Google Translate, DeepL Translate, Reverso Translation, and SYSTRAN Translate. All of these services offer immediate online translations at no charge. Many others function for a fee.

To use any of these services, 1) transcribe the text to be translated and 2) paste the transcription into the box provided. Most services will automatically identify the language, but they are not 100 percent accurate. Use the dropdown to properly identify the language if it is misidentified.



Figure 1. "Tadeusz," Dziennik Chicagoski (Chicago, Illinois), 5 March 1910, p. 5, col. 5

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It is extremely important to type all the diacritical marks from the original in the transcription. Using the alphabet of the original language increases the accuracy of online translation services. If the user's keyboard does not include the requisite letters or the user does not know how to type the foreign diacritical marks, an online keyboard may be the answer. For guidance, see the keyboards section below.

### **Google Translate**

Google Translate is available for over 130 languages. Clicking on the translated text will highlight the original text and offer an alternative translation for the highlighted word or phrase. Click on the audio icon to hear the text read aloud (original text or translated text). Clicking on the Lookup Details link initiates a Google search for all text in the box (either the original text or the translation). For an in-depth explanation of how the software works, see "Is Google Translate Correct? A Deep Dive into Google Translate Accuracy," <https://translatepress.com/is-google-translate-correct>.

### **DeepL Translate**

DeepL Translate furnishes translations in thirty-one languages. Click on any word in the translated text to see an alternative version. Share the results via email, Twitter, or Facebook. Edit the translated text with the help of DeepL Write, an AI-powered editor. DeepL Translate accepts files for translation in PDF, Microsoft Word, and PowerPoint formats. There is a 1500-character limit in the free version.

### **Reverso Translation**

Twenty-six languages are available at Reverso Translation. Reverso offers a visual keyboard for

## **Transcription**

Ś. P.  
Tadeuz

(aukochańszy syn i brat nasz)  
po krótkiej i ciężkiej chorobie,  
powiększ grono aniołków,  
dnia 3-go marca, 1910 roku, o  
godzinie 11-tej wieczorem, prze-  
żywszy 3 miesiące i 15 dni.  
Pogrzeb odbędzie się w nie-  
dzielę, dnia 6-go marca, b. r.,  
o godzinie 9-tej rano, z domu  
załoby, p. nr. 1447 W. Erie ul.,  
do kościoła sw. Trójcy, a stam-  
tąd na cmentarz sw. Wojciecha.  
Na ten smutny obrządek za-  
praszymy wszystkich krewnych  
I znajomych, w ciężkim żalu po-  
grążeni:  
Aleksander i Berta Czaja, ro-  
dzice; wraz z całą familią.

Figure 2. Transcribed text input using the TypeIt Polish keyboard at <https://polish.typeit.org>

inputting diacritical marks and letters (at the bottom of the input box). This system alleviates the need for an online or alternate keyboard. Highlight a sentence in the translated text and click on Rephrase to get alternative phrasing. Click on the audio icon to hear the text read aloud (either the original text or the translated text). Upload twelve different file formats. Free translations are limited to 2,500 words. The user can opt to purchase additional words over the limit.

### **SYSTRAN Translate**

SYSTRAN advertises fifty languages available for translation. Click on the audio icon to hear the translated text read aloud. The application accepts files for translation in PDF, Microsoft Word, and PowerPoint formats. SYSTRAN also translates RSS feeds and webpages. Online translations are limited to three thousand characters.

### **Bing Microsoft Translator**

Bing offers over 120 languages. Users must identify both the original language and target language. Choose Auto-detect to have the original language recognized automatically. Bing correctly identifies the language even when an incorrect language is chosen; for example, the application responded "try Polish" when an incorrect language was chosen. Bing provides helpful instructions for using the translator at <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/translator/help/bing>.

### **The translations**

The death notice for Thaddeus Czaja in figure 1 was transcribed by using the online Polish keyboard at <https://polish.typeit.org>, preserving the diacritical marks of the original. Hyphenated words were re-

conjoined and the transcribed text, shown in figure 2, was pasted into the input boxes of five free online translation services (Google Translate, DeepL Translate, Reverso Translation, Bing Microsoft Translator, and SYSTRAN Translate).

None of the five services correctly translated *S. P.*

in the first line. Overall, online translation services struggle with abbreviations. *S. P.* stands for *Świętej Pamięci* or Sacred Memory. Other abbreviations in the death notice fared better. DeepL Translate and Google Translate recognized *b. r.* or *br.* as “current year.” DeepL Translate, Google Translate, and Reverso Translation correctly identified *ul.* as the abbreviation for *ulica* (street), and DeepL translated the abbreviation into the English abbreviation of St.

All five services translated the text similarly with slightly different phrases and shades of meaning. In all cases, the translated text was adequate for a non-speaker to understand the event.

Young Thaddeus died on 3 March, after a short illness, at the age of three months and fifteen days. The funeral began at the family home at 1447 W. Erie Street. The mourners then progressed to Holy Trinity Church followed by St. Adalbert Cemetery. Relatives and friends were invited to attend and share in the grief of the parents, Alexander and Bertha Czaja.

## Keyboards

Genealogists have three solutions for inputting text in a foreign language: online keyboard applications, browser extensions, and the installation of a foreign language keyboard on the computer.

## Online keyboards

TypeIt (<https://www.typeit.org>) offers twenty-

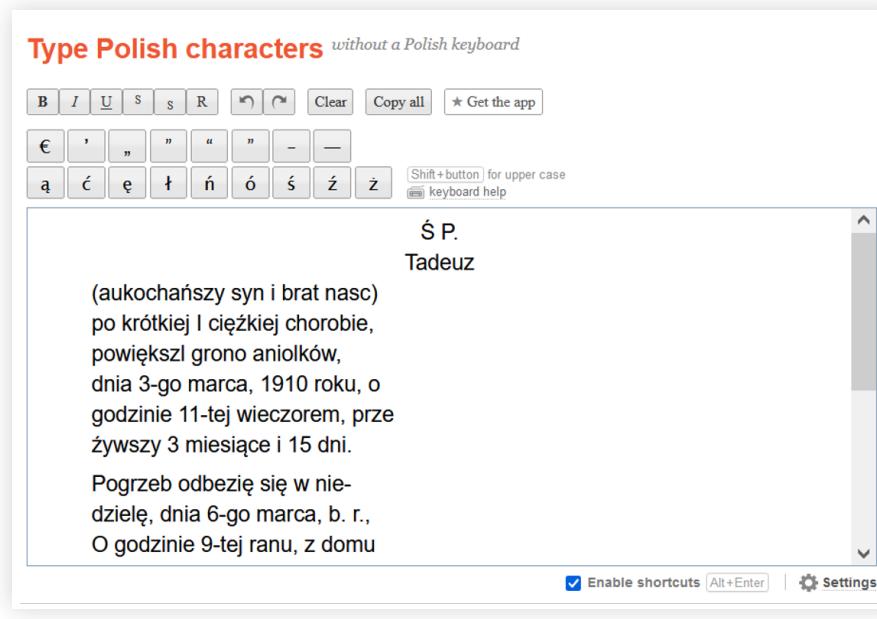


Figure 3. Polish Online Keyboard at <https://polish.typeit.org> (used with permission)

nine different keyboards. To use a keyboard, choose a language from the menu and type content into the input box. The content can be edited as necessary. Copy and paste the content into the application being used, in this case an online translation service.

It is important to use a language-specific keyboard as it enhances the results of online translation services. The absence of diacritical marks may affect the accuracy of the translation.

**Lexilogos** (<https://www.lexilogos.com/keyboard>) provides over 150 keyboards. To use it, choose a language from the dropdown and type content into the input box. Lexilogos allows the typed content to be saved in TXT format on the device in use. Otherwise, copy and paste into the appropriate application. Lexilogos includes links to various dictionaries, encyclopedias, and translation services, including Bing, DeepL, Google, and Reverso.

## Browser extension

Google's extension for its Chrome browser, Google Input Tools (<https://www.google.com/inputtools/chrome/index.html>), supplies a transliteration tool, handwriting tool, and selection of foreign language keyboards. Each option needs to be added separately after installing the extension.

The application only works while using Chrome and on the web. Installing a foreign keyboard on the computer provides a much broader application. As always, read the terms of service and privacy notices before installing a browser extension.

## Installing a foreign language keyboard

Most operating systems contain multiple

keyboards, but users often forget that they can change to a new keyboard or install a secondary keyboard.

For Windows users, Mauro Huculak of Windows Central offers illustrated instructions for adding and changing a keyboard layout at <https://www.windowscentral.com/how-change-your-keyboard-layout-windows-10#section-how-to-add-keyboard-layout-on-windows-10>. The process using Windows 11 is similar.

“Write in another language on Mac” at <https://support.apple.com/en-in/guide/mac-help/mchlp1406> documents the process for Mac OS users.

### Translation tips

1. Use a professional translator for all documents with legal implications. The American Translators Association maintains an online directory of over seven thousand individuals and companies offering translation services, at <https://www.atanet.org/directory>. For best results, choose a native speaker for the target language; for example, an English speaker to translate into English.
2. Use a genealogical word list to identify words in column headings or short texts.
3. For longer passages of text, consider using an online service, keeping in mind that an online service is not a substitute for a native speaker or a legal translation.
4. Consolidate any words that have been hyphenated. The online translator will not recognize the hyphenated words.
5. If the translated text is nonsense or misses words and phrases, check the transcription for words that have not been consolidated or

### ONLINE TRANSLATION SERVICES

#### Bing Microsoft Translator (<https://www.bing.com/translator>)

- Free online
- 120+ languages
- Accepts input from keyboard or microphone

#### Google Translate (<https://translate.google.com>)

- Free online
- 130+ languages
- Accepts keyboard input, images, documents, and websites for translation

#### DeepL Translate (<https://www.deepl.com/translator>)

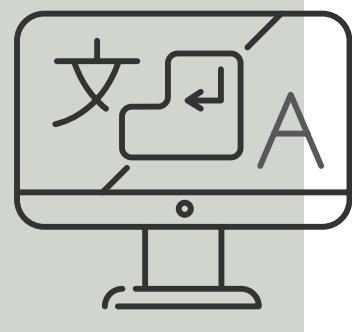
- Free version online (limited)
- Thirty-one languages
- Accepts PDFs, Microsoft Word, and PowerPoint files
- Pro service available

#### Reverso Translation (<https://www.reverso.net/text-translation>)

- Free version online (limited)
- Twenty-six languages
- Free app allows translation in any app or browser
- Premium service available

#### SYSTRAN Translate (<https://translate.systran.net>)

- Free version online (limited)
- Fifty languages
- Accepts files in multiple formats
- Paid service available



mis-transcribed text. The resulting translated text will correct itself as the transcription is corrected.

6. Enter the transcribed text into more than one online translator. While the translations will be similar, the nuances may be different.

### Conclusion

Use free online translation tools to garner context whenever a professional translation is not required. While not delivering the same quality as a professional translator, these services allow the genealogist to determine if a professional translation is warranted and get an overall feel for what a document in a foreign language says.

Use the proper keyboard to ensure the most accurate translation from an online service. 



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