

# Tips for Researching for Your Ancestors



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- **Go to [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)** - This is a free website that has many types of documents from all around the world from many years that you can search. Enter names of ancestors you know and many times you will find links to others that you don't.
- **A GREAT website to search on is [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)** This website has great resources, records and information, and many family trees from its members where you can tap into their research. This website **REQUIRES A MEMBERSHIP** though – they offer a free 14 day trial which you can sign up for but then have to remember to call 1-800-ANCESTRY to cancel it by Day 13. Having a membership enables easy use and accumulation of data from their records and allows you to create family trees to store info digitally that can be accessed by you from any computer.
- **Enter your ancestor's information into a Search Engine.** (For example: Betty Harver 1929 Minnesota) You will often times find a local newspaper article, a photo, genealogy sites that this person is found on, an obituary, etc.
- **Talk to relatives.** Call "Aunt Betty" – the Great Aunt that never misses anyone's birthday and keeps up with everyone's business! Her attention to detail can be a huge source of information for you. If you have a name of an ancestor and there is a living relative that would have stories or pictures or information about this person, visit with them (in person, by phone, or email) and ask them about the person. Family history work is exactly that – finding out the history of your family. It is more than dates and names and places. You will find out as you look for information beyond the names and dates, that they had struggles, triumphs, were pleasant or notorious or maybe even infamous!
- **If you keep hitting a roadblock** on a certain family line, **then give it a rest for a while** and work on another line. Many times, you can come back to the difficult line months or a year later, to find that records with that person on it have been recently added to databases, etc. It should be fun and interesting, not frustrating!
- **Contact your ancestor's church** for old records. If you know they were Methodist, contact the Methodist church in the area that they lived. Many times they will have records from baptisms, confirmations, births, weddings, etc. that they will share with family history researchers.
- **[www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com) is a great resource.** People around the world volunteer their time and efforts to photograph and index the headstones in cemeteries. This is a free website and you can search for your ancestor. Many times you can get birth and death dates, spouse's name, a woman's maiden name, family members, etc. from these pictures.
- **Search Google Images for photos** of ancestors, their headstones, pictures of their wills, etc. that are available because of people all over contributing everyday to the data that is available.
- **Resources for finding parents' names:** Great resources for finding parents' names are: birth records, obituaries, marriage records, military enrollment records, census records, death records.
- **Surnames change over time:** Many ancestors who immigrated had their surnames changed over time through immigration, language barriers etc. Look for variations (see pics above).

- **If you can't go further on your direct line, branch out your research to include data on brothers or sisters in the family.** For example, if you are unable to find your Great Grandfather Joe's mothers maiden name, search for her on records of Joe's brothers and sisters. You may not find Joe's birth record, but if you find it for a brother or sister, you've found Joe's mom's name.
- **Remember that family history is exactly that** – your family's history. When trying to fill in the gaps and connect the dots, think of what was going on in history at the time. For example, if you notice a male ancestor from Tennessee that died in France in 1942, remember that in history, the US was involved in WWII. Search WWII records of soldiers that were KIA and you will likely find that your ancestor was a soldier serving overseas and is buried in a US Military cemetery in France; or if several members of a family died right around the same time, search the internet for the history of that town – was there a plague or sickness that came through; or if your ancestors were well settled in Georgia in the 1860s and moved to Texas, why? Maybe their plantation was ruined in Civil War battles and they took up the Texas governor on his offer of free farmland to settlers that would come to Texas. The fun is not just finding the dates, but in figuring out what they did in the life in between.
- **Remember to always use a woman's maiden name when working on family history.** If you do not know it, leave it blank on forms and websites. For example, when using a computer to search for your grandmother Rose that married Pete Jones, if you enter her name as Rose Jones, the computer will exclude any records that may be under her maiden name (such as birth records or marriage records). If you leave her last name blank and her husband as Pete Jones, it will look for records of any Rose that match her dates (such as birth records, school records, etc) as well as records under Rose Jones.
- **Write down any tidbits of info on your ancestors that you are told or find.** If you know that your ancestor Jack Smith had 11 brothers and 1 sister and lived in Ohio, and you find a census record that lists Jack Smith as one of 12 sons and a daughter, that is a VERY strong indicator that you have the right family. Or if you know that your grandfather was blind, and you find a military draft card where someone by his same name lists "blind" under the handicaps section, that is a VERY strong indicator that the draft card is your ancestor.
- **Remember that there is often human error in old record keeping.** Often you will find a name spelled differently on a census record, etc. Do not be alarmed or discount this as not being your ancestor. Remember that back in the day, census records were gathered by people going door to door, farm to farm, knocking on the door and gathering the info on people living there from someone. The census taker wrote down what was told to them. So, maybe they spelled a name "Francis" instead of what your records show was actually "Frances". Sometimes surnames were misspelled because you had a German immigrant doing their best to convey their info to a census taker who may have been a French immigrant. In a situation like that, your German ancestor's info may have taken on some French phonetic spelling when written down. Also, it is humans who take these old census records and type/index what they understand the handwriting to say – sometimes census takers had illegible handwriting and so it is a "best guess" for the person transcribing the records. Sometimes, from way back (1700s and 1800s) and ancestors year of birth may hop around on you – remember, if the parents were busy on the farm when the census taker showed up, it may have been the 10 year old child that was giving information to the best of their knowledge to the census taker.
- **People remarried in the past as they do now.** Remember when you find an ancestor with more than one spouse, that they remarried. Way back, they had more early deaths and remarriages whereas in more modern times, we have more divorce and remarrying. Think through a situation to help it make sense. If you find your Great Grandpa Joe on a record, but with a different wife listed, look at the death date of the first wife; many times it will be just before the marriage date with the second wife. Remember to think beyond names and dates, but use those to help you assemble the story of their lives.