
CREATIVE HISTORY – KEYS TO LOCAL HISTORY

The focus of **Keys to Local History** is to help you learn about the history that is around you. This section discusses ways to think about what kind of questions to ask about your topic and where you can find resources to develop your research.

Because everyone approaches research differently and each project has many variables, this section is meant as a guideline to stimulate your thinking and improve your skills. Where appropriate, links will be made to other websites that provide more detailed step-by-step processes on particular topics.

THE FIRST STEPS

- Learn what kind of questions to ask and how to start researching.

ABOUT THE SOURCES

- Find out about primary sources, secondary sources and material culture
- Learn about the different primary sources, what you can discover in them, and where to find them
- Learn how to "read" primary sources and use them effectively

RESEARCH GUIDE

- Guidelines for how to research certain topics
- Ideas for organizing and managing your research
- Learn how to use primary sources effectively
- What you can do when you hit "brick walls"
- Reasons why it is important to you need to cite your sources

SHARING

- Ideas for creative ways of sharing your research with others.

RESEARCH GUIDE

This section is set up to provide you with:

How to Research

- Here you will find some guidelines on how to research certain topics.

Organizing and Managing Your Research

- Some ideas on how to organize and manage your research.

Getting Around “Brick Walls”

- What you can do when you hit “brick walls.”

Citing Your Sources

- Reasons why it is important to cite your sources.

Where appropriate, links will be made to other websites that provide more detailed step-by-step processes on particular topics.

HOW TO RESEARCH

This section is set up to guide you through some of the main historical research categories. Because there are so many variables and types of research questions, the outlines provided here are just to get you to start thinking about your topic and what types of sources you might be able to use. Where appropriate additional websites are listed to provide additional guidance and ideas.

People

- Learn about the different sources and techniques that will help you track down an individual.

Women

- Discover how to examine primary sources a bit differently to find clues about your female ancestor’s hard-to-find past.

Material Culture (Objects)

- Learn more about how to research an object, think about material culture as a valuable source, and how to use artifacts in your historical analysis.

Buildings and Houses

- Uncover what primary sources to look for and how use them to research your home or a building in your community.

HOW TO RESEARCH : PEOPLE

Start with the Basics

If you are researching an ancestor, ask family members for some initial information about when and where the person lived; any details surrounding dates of birth, marriage, and death; what the person did for a living, etc. You might get lucky and get copies of important documents to start your research.

If you want to know more about an ancestor or someone *not* related to you, go to your local history library or genealogical society to learn if there are any books, papers, articles, documents, oral histories, or photographs about the person you are researching. Ask a librarian for help if you are not sure where to start first.

Look through transcribed or compiled books at your local history library or genealogical society. Take advantage of the efforts made by others to gather birth, marriage, death, or burial information into one place. These compilations can simplify your initial research making the information easier to find. But make sure to look for the original documents. Compiled sources can have errors or missing information.

Gather as much basic information as you can. Do not worry at this point if you are not sure how accurate it is.

Next Look for Details

Begin asking the *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, and *how* questions about the new information you have. In what directions can these new clues direct you?

Think about what you learned in the Types of Sources section. Which sources do you think would work best for your search? Below is a list of suggested steps and primary sources to begin with. Every community had different types of sources available, so ask your local librarian or visit your genealogical society for more information.

Vital records, obituaries, and cemetery records give you the initial mileposts about a person's life and give you a time frame to work with. If you know the specific dates about an individual's birth, marriage, and death, search for the documents so you can at least *verify* the dates. You never know, you might find more information than you expected.

If you do not know exactly when a person died, check your local history library or genealogical society to see if they have compiled lists of birth, marriage, or death records, obituaries, or cemetery transcriptions. Finding an obituary might furnish new clues including: personal information such as birth date and place, immediate family information, occupation, if the individual lived elsewhere for a time, if he was a veteran you might find a regiment name and number, where the burial site is located, organizational memberships, or key events of someone's life.

City directories can give you a sense of when a person lived in your area, where his or her home was, and maybe where he or she worked. Start with a year you know the individual lived in your town. Then look backwards and forwards through as many years as are available to you. Tracking someone over many years might reveal different jobs, residences, and might suggest when the individual moved into or out of the community.

Census records can be incredibly helpful because they record a wide range of data that can provide you a wealth of clues. Information changes depending on which year you are researching. If you are researching a family member, such as a grandparent, start with the most recent census available, which is 1930.

If the person is not related, begin with a year you are confident the individual lived in the community. Be patient when searching, names might be slightly misspelled, so try out all

options of a surname spelling. Once you find the person, see if you can follow them to other decades prior to or after the one with which you began.

As you look through your first round of primary sources keep asking yourself questions about what information is accurate or what you find contradictory. Each new clue will help to verify a fact as true or prove it false or unreliable. As you learn more details you can begin to venture into more primary sources depending on where the evidence leads you and what you want to know about the individual.

Researching people can be very difficult, but also *very* rewarding. Above all be patient, stay focused, and have fun.

For more information about what is available in your area check out:

Cyndi's List of Genealogy Sites on the Internet

[<http://www.cyndislist.com/>]

Family Search by the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints

[<http://www.familysearch.org/>]

US GenWeb Project

[<http://www.usgenweb.org/>]

RootsWeb

[<http://www.rootsweb.com/>]

Ancestry.com

[<http://www.ancestry.com/search/>]

Genealogy.com

[http://www.genealogy.com/index_n.html]

HOW TO RESEARCH: WOMEN

Start with the Basics

Researching women can be challenging because most did not leave documents behind. Typically daughters or wives are mentioned in reference to their father or husband's names and accounts. But by using some creative research techniques you might be able to find more about your female ancestor than you thought.

- Begin with some of the same research techniques as in the How To Research : People section.
- If you are researching an ancestor, ask family members if they have any documents, letters or diaries by the women you are interested in researching.
- What can you find out about the men in the woman's life? Think about researching her husband(s), father, or brothers, you might find some details specifically about her that can develop into new research questions.

Next Look for Details

Perhaps someone has already done research before you. Investigate published local family histories for both the woman's maiden name and married name. These books or

articles might not have notes or bibliographies, but they can make an excellent outline for your research. If the publications do have notes, your job of tracking down sources will be much easier.

Obituaries, cemetery records and tombstone transcriptions: If possible begin with her death and work backwards. If you know when a woman died, search for her obituary in the local newspaper. You might find her maiden name, date of birth, where she was born, names of other family members, and perhaps more details about her life and where she lived. Cemetery records might provide information about when she died and who paid for her plot and tombstone. Sometimes tombstones will have more detailed information about family relations or cause of death. Be cautious when reading tombstones, they do not always provide accurate information.

Census records: If you know approximately when and where she lived search for her by using her husband's name. Depending on what years you are examining, you could learn approximately when and where she was born, where her parents were born, how long she was married, how many children she had and how many survived, more about her children and possible in-laws, and if she immigrated when she arrived in America.

Marriage records: Every location is different in how and when marriage documents were recorded. If you are looking for marriage records that precede the date when marriages were officially recorded with the county government, search in local area church records. Marriage records will give you the woman's maiden name, sometimes her age, where she was living, and the name of her parents.

Land records and deeds: If you find land records for a particular family, make sure you read the body of the document because you might find additional family names and more details about family relationships. Early land records typically only mention the names of men since women were not allowed to enter into legal transactions without their husband's consent. If a woman made a property transaction she was most likely widowed and the property became part of her dower rights. Over time women gained more legal rights and were listed more often as main property owners. Learn more about the history of women's rights to better understand the documents in the time period you are researching.¹

Wills and probate records: Wills can be important resources when researching women. The documents left by their fathers and husbands usually provide a wealth of information about family relationships. You might only find the first name of his wife or daughters, but there is a chance he stated his wife's maiden name or the men his daughters married. Probate records can also detail family relationships. Whether a man died with or without

¹ Sharon DeBartolo Carmack, *A Genealogist's Guide to Discovering Your Female Ancestors* (Cincinnati, OH: Betterway Books, 1998) 28-29.

a will, probate documents usually indicate surviving individuals, where heirs lived, real and personal property inventories, and the distribution of the estate.²

Military and pension records: Throughout history women have served in the military or played a roll supporting military efforts. Some women were paid, but many volunteered their services as nurses, spies, seamstresses, or camp cooks. While a few women did serve in earlier wars and eventually earning a pension on their own, your best chance of finding a woman's military records is if she served during the twentieth-century. Where a woman will most often show up is in her husband's military records, or in her own application for a widow or mother's pension. These documents can be an invaluable source of personal and family information and relationships.³

Taking the Next Step

In addition to looking for documents made *about* women, also try to look for source made *by* women.

- Letters
- Diaries
- Family bibles
- Family artifacts or heirlooms
- Oral histories
- Recipe books

If you are having trouble finding documents about one specific woman, look to items produced by other female family members, friends, or women in the same community. While other women did not have the same experiences, there are probably enough similarities to suggest what your ancestor's life was like.

Take some time to better understand the social history during the era of when a woman lived. Looking beyond your community to regional or national issues might give you clues about what concerns your female ancestor faced, what controversial events she participated in, or what her beliefs were. Some historical social topics to investigate are:

- Sexuality
- Childbearing and child rearing
- Women's work (both inside and outside of the home)
- The expected roles of women
- Drug addiction and prostitution
- Religion and spiritualism
- Women's rights movement

² Carmack, *Female Ancestors*, 39-40.

³ Carmack, *Female Ancestors*, 26-27.

- Moral reform
- Voting rights ⁴

For more information check out:

American Women's History: A Research Guide by Ken Middleton at Middle Tennessee State University Library

[<http://www.mtsu.edu/~kmiddlet/history/women.html>]

Women in World History

[<http://chnm.gmu.edu/wwh/index.html>]

Women and Social Movements in the United States, 1600-2000

[<http://womhist.binghamton.edu/index.html>]

HOW TO RESEARCH: MATERIAL CULTURE (OBJECTS)

Think about the objects you have around you everyday. What type of products do you use, what car do you drive, what kind of clothes do you wear? What do you think these objects say about you? Do you collect items such as stamps, comic books, baseball cards, or tools? If so, why do you collect them? What historical significance do you think these objects have? They have a lot more significance than you are probably aware of.

If you step back and look at who made an object, what materials it was made of, how it was constructed, where and when it was made, and why it was made, you can begin to understand more about the person, society, or culture that produced the object. By researching material culture you can also uncover valuable details about those individuals who lived in a community but left little or no written records.

Because there are so many possible artifacts available for study in addition to different levels of methodology and expertise, this section only presents some basic steps of questioning and evaluating so that you can get started.

Start with the Basics

The list of questions presented below is based on the model developed by E. McClung Fleming of the Winterthur Museum in Delaware suggesting a systematic approach to asking questions of artifacts.⁵ Do not worry if you cannot answer all the questions. They are only a preliminary list to help you begin your examination. This is a process of discovery and you will continually revisit some of the questions as well as add your own. Make sure to use all your senses when evaluating an object. Paying attention to how an item feels, smells, or sounds might uncover hidden clues that might not be noticed by a visual examination alone.

⁴ Bullet list of women's topics from Carmack, *Female Ancestors*, 19-42.

⁵ Kyvig and Marty, *Nearby History*, 149-151; L. Stanley-Blackwell, "Guidelines to Researching Material Culture in Antigonish," "From Querns to Quilts: A Selected View of the Material Culture of Antigonish, Nova Scotia," <http://people.stfx.ca/lstanley/Material/Guidelines.htm> (accessed 2 August 2006).

History

- Where and when was the artifact made?
- Who made the item?
- For whom was the item made?
- Why was the object made?
- What is the artifact's function?
- Has ownership of the item changed over time? If so, how?

Material

- What is the artifact made of? (Wood, metal, fiber, ceramic, stone, glass, etc.)
- Were the materials used to produce it local or imported?
- Does the type of material suggest a particular use?

Construction

- How is the object put together?
- What are the dimensions and weight of the artifact?
- Is there an indication of special techniques used for construction?
- How are the parts organized?
- Does the object stand on its own or is it part of a larger item?
- Are there any tool marks or other evidence of construction techniques?
- Is the artifact made by hand or by machine?
- Is it sophisticated or rustic in its construction?

Design

- What is the object's structure and form?
- Does the artifact represent a particular style?
- What kind of ornamentation does the item have?
- Are there any distinguishing marks that can help with identification?
- Does the object's ornamentation suggest a particular use?

Function

- Does the artifact's design suggest an ornamental, utilitarian, or entertainment use?
- What is its intended use?
- Has its intended use changed over time? If so, how?
- Does the object represent the culture in which it was made? If so, how?

Next Look for Details

With an initial list of preliminary answers, the challenge of researching the artifact in more detail begins. There are a few things to keep in mind during your interpretation:

- **Do not examine the object in isolation of its culture.** Conclusions about what the item represents could be skewed if interpreted separate from the culture that produced it.

- **A single object should not represent a larger segment of a culture than it actually does.** One item should not be used to generalize how an object was used and what culture created it.
- **View an object within the time period it was created.** Bringing modern view-points and interpretations to an eighteenth-century artifact will alter your analysis.
- **Make sure to evaluate both the functional and aesthetic elements of an object.** Do not be so focused on one element as to forget the significance of the other.⁶

Because it is often difficult, if not impossible, to find supporting documents for your specific artifact, you will have to broaden your research scope. Just as secondary sources are helpful in providing topic overviews, look to books, articles, and museum websites that discuss your general area of interest. Learn what you can by examining articles about similar objects, production trends during a similar time period, social or cultural trends during an era, or the particular manufacturer if known.

Do not forget to include research using other primary sources. Revisit Types of Sources and How to Think About Sources and “Read” Them and ask of your artifact the same types of questions you would of any other document. For example, researching magazines and newspapers might uncover an old advertisement for your particular object, or give you clues to how your artifact related to the social and cultural dynamics of an era.

As you discover what your object is, during what time period it was made, and how your object was used, you can begin placing the artifact into a social and cultural context. While this is the most challenging part of the process, it is also very rewarding. Artifacts bring a different dimension to an historical interpretation by providing a sense of realism with their physical connection to the past. Being able to touch and handle an object brings along with it the desire to know what life was like in another era. Including material culture into your historical research will allow you to explore your topic to its fullest potential by weaving together the people, places, and things into a broader social, cultural, and historical context.

For more information check out:

Material Culture Tutorial at History Works

[<http://www.historyworksohio.org/tutorials/detail.cfm?id=2>]

American Centuries...View from New England at Memorial Hall Museum Online

[<http://memorialhall.mass.edu/home.html>]

⁶ Kyvig and Marty, *Nearby History*, 153.

HOW TO RESEARCH: BUILDINGS AND HOUSES

Start with the Basics

If you are researching your own house first try to collect all the documents and photographs you or your family already have. Ask neighbors what they remember about the house and previous owners. Ask the *who, what, where, when, why, and how* questions about the information you have. Then take a close look at the building and property for clues by asking a series of question. In what directions can these new clues direct you?

Here are a few suggestions to start with:

- What is the style of the building?
- What materials were used to constructed it?
- Is there a cornerstone with a date of construction?
- Are there any obvious additions or deletions to the building?
- What kind of architectural details does it have?
- How large or small is the overall property?
- What are the landscape features around the property?
- How does the structure compare to the surrounding buildings?
- Are the surrounding buildings similar or very different?
- How is the foundation constructed?
- What do the windows look like?
- What is the roof made of?

Whether it is a residence or a commercial structure, become familiar with the architectural style of the building and the others nearby. Search online resources or find books to decipher the architectural details that can provide clues to the building's age.

Go to your local history library and look for historic house inventories or neighborhood surveys for your house or area. Sometimes a person or preservation group has previously researched buildings in your neighborhood. Make use of this information as a guide and tailor the information to your own specific research. Your library might also have a "how to" guide about house research in your community. It never hurts to ask a librarian for help.

Look for books about the general history of your community. There might be information about how your town physically developed, clues to why and how certain structures were built, a biography on one of your house's early owners, or a description of your neighborhood when it was built.

It takes much more time and effort, but try to investigate earlier owners of your property. You might discover details about how the use and structure of the property or building changed over the years. For example, knowing that a son and his young bride lived with

his parents at their New England family farm, explains why there were two separate kitchens in one large farmhouse.⁷

Next Look for Details

Land records and deeds are the best sources for researching a building. By “chaining the titles” (matching the deeds from grantee to grantor) you can follow the ownership of the property back as far as you wish. If you know who owned a property during a certain time period you might uncover details about how that owner used the property or changed it. When researching be aware that a deed **does not** necessarily mean a building stood on the property. Do not assume that an early building was built in conjunction with the earliest known deed. To verify building dates you will need additional evidence.

Building permits can give you detailed information about when a building was planned, built, altered, added to, or parts torn down. These sources might also provide items such as the original height or placement of the building on a lot, original construction materials, the architect, or original owner. Search the town or county building, inspection, or land use office for building permits.

Assessor’s records will provide you with the legal description of a property that can make researching land records easier. You might also find the names of previous owners, the value of the house over time, or if several lots were acquired to create one larger property.

Photographs can be excellent for showing you how the building changed (or did not change) over time. You might discover different exterior building and landscape details, images of previous owners, different neighboring buildings, how the neighborhood changed over time, or even find visual evidence of socio-economic fluctuations in the area. Try searching for photos by address first, and if that does not work search for a neighboring house or street block. Sometimes long distance or panoramic shots will include your building of interest. Also make note of any nearby landmarks. Photographs of another well-known structure might include your building in the background.

City directories that list occupants by address are great resources when you want to find a pattern of occupancy over time. If you are researching a commercial building or a former rental property, yearly directories can follow business comings and goings, and provide information about long- or short-term renters.

Fire Insurance maps are amazing resources in locating where a building stood on a property, and additional details about the structure itself. The Sanborn Fire Insurance Company was the largest company to produce maps, but not the only one. Other com-

⁷ Thomas C. Hubka, *Big House, Little House, Back House, Barn: The Connected Farm Buildings of New England* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 1984) 90, 148.

pany names include: Baist, Rascher, Richards, and Robinson. If you cannot find Sanborn maps, ask a librarian if they have maps under other names.⁸

Census records began recording household street addresses in 1900. By using the census you can get an idea of how many people lived in a given house or institution; find out more about who lived in the same neighborhood; or even discover the ethnic, social, or economic make up of the area over time.

Oral histories are not available in every community. If they are available, investigate any interviews for possible references to previous owners, the house, the property, or the neighborhood.

Taking the Next Step

After researching the building from the outside, if possible bring your investigation inside to discover how the building was lived in and used. As you learn more about the age of the structure and the people who occupied it, examine how the interior reflected the company or family's lifestyle. Styles change and people often alter their living space to suite the social norm, so keep in mind what you find will probably represent a series of styles and aesthetic tastes. It is not always possible to investigate a building's interior, but the following are some suggestions if you can spend time searching inside.

Become familiar with houses built during the same era as yours. Search through period-publications such as women's magazines and home catalogs to understand the house design, typical room layouts, decorating styles, and modern conveniences.⁹ Investigate older photographs or illustrations of building interiors. What are the decorating trends during certain periods?

Search closets, false ceilings, and floorboards to uncover any old paint, wallpaper, early wood floors or evidence of room alterations.¹⁰ Look at the walls. Cracked plaster could be evidence of room alterations, such as a walled-up doorway or window. Holes or obvious patches might indicate the locations of old light fixtures, decorations, or early appliances.¹¹ Wear marks on wood floors might reveal the placement of floor coverings, the locations of heavy furniture, heavy traffic areas in the house, or repairs.¹²

⁸ Betsy J. Green, *Discovering the History of Your House and Neighborhood* (Santa Monica, CA: Santa Monica Press, 2002) 49.

⁹ Barbara J. Howe, Dolores A. Fleming, Emory L. Kemp, and Ruth Ann Overbeck, *Houses and Homes: Exploring Their History* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1997) 30, 37.

¹⁰ Howe, *Houses and Homes*, 30.

¹¹ Howe, *Houses and Homes*, 30-32.

¹² Howe, *Houses and Homes*, 34-35.

Read through social history books about your particular time period. The connections between architectural trends, social statuses and interactions, social and familial expectations of women, household decor and appearances, all contribute to the general history of your house. You might not uncover the specific details of your building, but the more you know about the social and economic background of a building, the better you understand the building itself.

For more information check out:

Hometown Handbook : Architecture by W. Dean Eastman at PrimaryResearch.org
[<http://www.primaryresearch.org/PRTHB/Architecture/index.htm>]

Building Histories Tutorial by the Denver Public Library Western History and Genealogy Department
[<http://photoswest.org/exhib/buildings/intro.htm>]

Researching a Historic Property by the National Register of Historic Places
[<http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb39/>]

ORGANIZING AND MANAGING YOUR RESEARCH

The more you research the bigger your pile of papers will get. How do you keep track of everything?

No single organizational method works for everyone. Some people use stacks of index cards full of notes, or hand write everything in notebooks, others photocopy their sources and store the papers in folder, and some only use the computer. There is no correct method of organizing and there are pros and cons to every method. What is most important is that you find a system that is organized, efficient, and above all, **will work for you.**

Every project is different and you may find yourself using a combination of methods. Below are a few ideas that can help you to find your own organizational style. Do you have a preferred organizational style not seen here, or a variation of one? Email [Creative History](mailto:CreativeHistory) to add it to the list.

Organizing by Topic

- If you are photocopying most of your sources, this might be the best method for you. It gives you the opportunity to gather everything you can find on a particular topic and collect it in one place.
- This is also a good method if you do most of your work on the computer or have a lot of digital files.
- Have a research log for each topic you are researching. This will keep you organized and minimize duplicate research. Keep adding sources you want to search and cross off ones you have already read.

- Having all the information on one topic in one place minimizes confusion of what source contained what fact.
- TIP: When you photocopy an item, write a detailed source citation on the copy immediately. Include a copy of the title page with the author, publisher, and date when you photocopy part of a book. Make sure page numbers are easy to read. Then staple everything together to keep from losing the pages. Make a note of which library or archive you found the source. Write down any necessary call numbers.

Organizing by Source

- For those of you who think about information based on your sources, this method might work best for you.
- This method can be helpful if you hand-write all your notes on index cards, notebooks, or do most of your work on the computer
- Fill pages with notes from your source, and do not forget to add the page numbers of where you found information.
- Write down all quotes carefully and make additional notes if necessary to put the quote within a context.
- Using loose-leaf notepaper in a 3-ring binder will give you more flexibility when organizing your sources.
- Have a master research log for all your sources. Keep adding sources you want to search and cross off ones you have already read.
- TIP : Write all the bibliographic detail about your source at the top of the page. Also make a note of which library or archive you found your source so you can find it quickly again if needed. Write down any necessary call numbers.

Organizing by Person

- This is a must if you are doing genealogical research. Keeping detailed accounts of individuals and families is critical. There are many methods of organizing your data but usually it is based on one person per folder, or one family per three-ring binder.
- Arrange sources chronologically so you can find an item quickly.
- Since many documents will apply to two or more people (such as a marriage record), keep a list at the front of each folder cross-referencing a document to other folders. Or make duplicate photocopies to put in each folder.¹³

¹³ Sharon DeBartolo Carmack, *Organizing Your Family History Search* (Cincinnati, OH: Betterway Books, 1999) 16.

- Have a research log for each person you are researching. This will keep you organized and minimize duplicate research. Keep adding sources you want to search and cross off ones you have already read.
- For genealogy, there are many organizational tools and forms to help you organize. Use pre-designed forms or make your own to fit your own research style.

Organizing Your Digital Files

- This is a combination of all the presented methods.
- You can develop a very organized and detailed system of digital folders within folders that will make managing your computer files easy.
- Begin with one main folder titled for a topic or person. Within that folder can be documents containing your notes and outlines, another folder can just contain census record information or notes from a specific source, maybe you have a folder with only digital photographs.
- To minimize the paper trail, maybe you can try scanning all your paper documents.
- Rearranging your different topic folders can help you develop an outline when you are ready to write.
- TIP : Develop a system of organization early to avoid rearranging files later. Name your digital folders clearly and simply. Put files in the appropriate folders right away to keep your computer desktop neat and clutter-free.

The links below are mainly for organizing people and family trees, but some of the ideas might inspire you to develop your own forms and organizational methods. Check out:

In a Pile or a File by Rita F. Bartholomew

[<http://timeforitnow.knotsindeed.com/genealogy/book/beginbook.html>]

Organizing Your Family Records by Desmond Walls Allen and Carolyn Earle Billingsley

[<http://www.arkansasresearch.com/g-organ.html>]

Organizing Your Paper Files Using File Folders by Mary E. Hill, AG, ML at Family Search (LDS)

[http://www.familysearch.org/Eng/Search/RG/frameset_rg.asp?Dest=G1&Aid=&Gid=&Lid=&Sid=&Did=&Juris1=&Event=&Year=&Gloss=&Sub=&Tab=&Entry=&Guide=ALL_REF_DOC_-_Organizing_Paper_Files.ASP]

Cyndi's List - Supplies, Charts, Forms, Etc.

[<http://www.cyndislist.com/supplies.htm>]

GETTING AROUND "BRICK WALLS"

Getting stuck on a line of research is very frustrating. Eventually we all hit dead ends, but do not give up right away because in many cases you can readjust your research process, finding new clues to get you around that brick wall. Below are a few ideas to give your research that little extra push it might need.

Help keep this list growing. Share your ideas and solutions by emailing [Creative History](mailto:CreativeHistory@creativehistory.net) your success stories.

- If you have the time, step away from your research for a period of time. Sometimes the best solution is to give your mind a rest, then revisit your material later with a fresh brain and set of eyes.
- As you research you will be asking new questions as you answer previous ones. Revisit some of your research notes, photocopies, and books for clues to some of your new questions, you might be surprised at what you find.
- Try to look back at your sources regularly to keep your research process active. You might suddenly see a piece of information in a different context that will inspire a new line of research.
- Take a closer look at the footnotes in some of your secondary sources. Did you miss a comment that could redirect your line of questioning?
- If you feel stuck, start writing. Don't worry about how it reads just start getting ideas out of your head. Even if it is just an outline, writing about your subject can show where your research needs more work. It can also bring you a sense of clarity about your topic so you know you are going down the right path, or need to readjust your thinking.
- Think about how you can approach the problem from a different angle. If you are researching a family, examine all the siblings instead of just your direct ancestor. Documents about a sibling might present those elusive details you were looking for about the parents.
- Not everything in print is trustworthy. If you are using compiled or abstracted sources from a book, article, or website, do yourself a favor and look for the original items. Everyone makes mistakes and transcribed sources can be full of them. You also might find a bit of useful information that the person abstracting the source overlooked because they found it useless.
- Are you using only one document to support a fact? Try finding additional sources to see if those bring forward any new information.
- Are you looking for information under just one surname? Last names are notorious for being misspelled in documents. Look for **all** the possible spelling variations on a person's

name. Names were often spelled phonetically (how it sounds) which can produce interesting variations. Different spellings might have occurred by accident, or purposefully to adapt into a new culture. Keep in mind that transcribing difficult handwriting can easily result in misspellings. Think of how someone might mistakes reading the name. Do you know the person's first and middle name? Someone with the given names of Charles Joseph, might go by either name in official documents.

- Know the history of the county in which you are researching. Over time counties borders change and new counties developed from the splitting of older, larger ones. You might actually need to visit a neighboring county courthouse to find the information you are looking for. For example: If you are searching for 1790 land records in what is currently Roanoke County, Virginia, you need to know that Roanoke County was formed in 1838 from part of Botetourt County. If you do not find the records in Roanoke County, then you might be successful searching the Botetourt County land records.¹⁴
- Look for maps of the town in which you are searching. Sometimes using visual references will spark a new way of thinking about a problem. Seeing on a map where employees lived in relations to their workplace could give you new ideas about how to think about the town's transportation.
- Sometime photographs can re-ignite your inspiration. Finding photographs of a building at different time periods can give you an idea of how the structure changed over the decades, or what different businesses occupied the space. New information always inspires new questions.
- Create a timeline to see where you are missing information and then try to fill in the gaps.

HOW TO CITE YOUR SOURCES AND WHY IT IS SO IMPORTANT

Learning how to properly cite the sources you use is a *very important* step to your research. Most importantly it shows you are a responsible researcher and writer by giving credit to those whose research you used or ideas you quoted. For beginning researchers it can be confusing to know how to blend your own ideas with others and when it is appropriate to footnote a source. See [Plagiarism: What It is and How to Recognize and Avoid It](http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml) [http:// www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml] for more details.

Another reason for footnoting your text is to share your findings with other future researchers. Do not be selfish by keeping resources to yourself. By giving another person hints into your research process makes your piece of work much more user-friendly and credible. Just think how much easier it is to know what page of a book a fact is on, rather than skimming through the entire book; or knowing a family's page and line in a census

¹⁴ Alice Eichholz, ed., *Ancestry's Red Book: American State, County and Town Sources* (Salt Lake City: Ancestry, Inc., 1992) 791.

record, instead of rolling through half a reel of microfilm. Be considerate of your fellow researchers and provide them an information trail. It is highly beneficial for you as well by keeping *you* from frustrating duplicate research if you need to revisit a book or document.

If you are writing an article, sometimes the format of the publication does not allow for footnotes. If that is the case, try to at least provide a "For Further Reading" list of the key book, articles, and primary sources you used.

Finally, respect the historical field by using the appropriate bibliographic style. Different fields use different citation methods, and for history it is the Chicago Manual of Style. Below are a few basic formats for both notes and bibliographic entries. See [Chicago Manual of Style Citation Guide](http://www.lib.ohio-state.edu/sites/guides/ChicagoManualofStyleCitationGuide) [http://www.lib.ohio-state.edu/sites/guides/ChicagoManualofStyleCitationGuide.html] for additional formats or check your local library or bookstore for a reference book with even more detailed variations. An excellent book showing citations for a wide variety of primary sources is *Evidence! Citation & Analysis for the Family Historian*. This book covers how to cite census records, letters, deeds, probate records, and much more.

Book

Note:

¹ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 44.

Biblio:

Lowenthal, David. *The Past is a Foreign Country*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Article in a Journal

Note:

² Ellen Eisenberg, "Looking for Zalman: Making Historical Scholarship Visible to Undergraduates," *The History Teacher* 38, no. 3 (May 2005): 329.

Biblio:

Eisenberg, Ellen. "Looking for Zalman: Making Historical Scholarship Visible to Undergraduates." *The History Teacher* 38, no. 3 (May 2005): 325-340.

Newspapers

Note:

³ *Boulder Daily Camera*, 3 June 1894.

Biblio:

Boulder Daily Camera

Websites

Website citations can vary quite a bit in style depending on the information available. By following the general format below you will have enough for an appropriate citation. If you cannot find information for an item, leave it out.

- Author (if available)
- Title of the page or heading
- If from an online journal or magazine, cite the magazine name/ issue/date
- Title of the website or owner of the site
- Full Internet address of page (URL)
- The date you accessed the information

Note:

⁴ Meyerink, Kory L., "Obituaries: More Than Meets the Eye," *Genealogy.com*, http://www.genealogy.com/76_kory.html (accessed 3 June 2006).

Biblio:

Meyerink, Kory L. "Obituaries: More Than Meets the Eye." *Genealogy.com*.
http://www.genealogy.com/76_kory.html.