

Researching Through Maternal and Sibling Lines

“A woman is to be from her house three times: when she is christened, married, and buried.”

Thomas Fuller (1654-1734)

“It is not fitting and proper that a woman should appear in a court of law or a public assemblage of men.”

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826)

Is It Possible to Research Maternal & Sibling Lines? Why Should We Attempt It?

- A Resounding YES, IT IS POSSIBLE!!!
- Because sometimes the answer is in plain sight
- Because sometimes the way through the brick wall is an end run around the outside

Some Sources to Consider When Tracing Maternal and Sibling Records

- Letters
- Diaries, Journals, and Biographies
 - Her own
 - Relatives and Friends
 - Other women like your ancestor
- Published Family Histories
- Oral History
- Newspapers
- Family Bibles
- Cemetery Records and Tombstone Inscriptions
- Church Records
 - Normal baptismal, marriage, and death records
 - Minutes; Lists of congregants
 - Another source: Women and Religion in America by Rosemary Ruether and Rosemary Keller
- School
- Medical
 - Some of these are available at Family History Libraries

Biographies & Diaries

- Yes, there are biographies on women
- Sometimes, they are part of an anthology
- Sometimes, they stand alone
- Many women kept diaries
 - Some of these have been published
 - If a woman was a midwife, her diaries have many records that may not be found elsewhere

Still Other Sources to Consider When Tracing Maternal and Sibling Records

- Land Records
- Orphan's and Guardianship Records
- Wills and Probate
- Court Records
- Marriage Records

- **Divorce Records**
 - There were 2 types in colonial and the early national period:
 - “a vinculo matrimonii” This was absolute divorce, both could remarry
 - “a mensa et thors” This meant separation from bed and board, neither could remarry
 - at common law, a divorce “a vinculo matrimonii” bars the wife of dower; but not a divorce “a mensa et thors,” except for the crime of adultery

Women’s Rights

- Women had what was called “dower rights”
- This was to protect married women who, under the legal principle of coverture, were forbidden from making contracts
 - Under traditional English common law, an adult unmarried woman was considered to have the legal status of “feme sole,” while a married woman had the status of “feme covert”
 - A “feme sole” had the right to own property and make contracts in her own name
 - A “feme covert” was not recognized as having legal rights and obligations distinct from those of her husband in most respects. Instead, through marriage a woman's existence was incorporated into that of her husband, so that she had very few recognized individual rights of her own

Dower Rights

- These are rights that a non-owner spouse has in the real property of his or her spouse
- It was originally set up when the husband was the only real property owner
- These rights have existed in America since the 1600s
- They were designed to allow the non-owner wife to make sure that, if her husband sold their home without her permission, she would still have some protection in the value of the real property
- If the husband later died, the wife could claim the one-third of the value of her right to live in the home
- She could also claim the one-third of the value of income produced by any farm, rental or other real property that was owned by her husband
- These rights would continue for the rest of her life
- Thus, a wife was insured that she would not be homeless or without some support during her lifetime
- Land records may include notarized statements from the wife assenting to the sale or transferral of the property
 - When a man sold or deeded property, his wife had to agree even if her name was not on the property
- Many times these statements included her maiden name

Speaking of Marriage, Children, and Divorce

- Fully 11% of women born between 1860 and 1880 never married
 - This was the highest figure throughout American history
 - This possibly had to do with it being the aftermath of the Civil War
- Children:
 - In 1800, there was on average 7 children per family
 - In 1900, there was on average 3.5 children per family
 - Infant mortality was highest on the frontier, sometimes reaching 25-30%; for this reason, some children were not named until they were several months old

- **Regarding divorce:**
 - In the 1880s, divorces were 1 per 18 marriages
 - In the 1920s, divorces were 1 per 6 marriages
 - There were very few divorces in the 1930s, mostly for economic reasons; women were more likely to get aid if their husband simply abandoned them

Some Other Sources to Consider When Tracing Maternal and Sibling Records

- **Legislative Petitions**
 - Petitions for moral reform and woman suffrage that were submitted to State and National legislatures
 - **Other Sources:**
 - Guide to the Records of the US House of Representatives, 1789-1989
 - Congressional Record (1873 – Present)
 - Prior to the Congressional Record, there was the Congressional Globe (1833 – 1873)
- **Passenger Arrival Lists**
- **Naturalization Documents**
- **Passport Applications**
- **Military Records and Pensions**
- **Tax Lists and Rent Rolls**
- **City Directories**

Women and Business

- Women were routinely listed as “housekeeper” or “keeping house” in the census but this didn’t mean they didn’t have a job outside the home
- In the 19th century, the most common women’s jobs outside the home were teachers and nurses (especially during the Civil War)
 - Florence Nightingale made nursing an acceptable position for women
- Working as a seamstress was also common
- If a woman was single or poor, she might work in a factory or as a nanny
- In 1844, Lowell Mill factory workers organized the *Lowell Female Labor Reform Association* (LFLRA) to press for better pay and working conditions. Sarah Bagley became the first President of LFLRA
- They eventually joined with the *New England Workingmen’s Association*

What Else is Interesting?

- Women began to go in larger numbers to the universities in the 1860s and by 1880, they made up a third of the entire student population
- In 1850, Elizabeth Blackwell became the first woman to graduate from a US medical school
- The invention of the typewriter in the 1860s led to more women being employed in offices
- By 1900, three quarters of America’s typists and stenographers were women

Other Tidbits I Should Know

- The Social Security Death Index shows maiden names
- Death records (official death certificates began in the early 1900s in most states—cities or counties may have earlier records)
- In Hispanic families, the wife’s maiden name is kept and appended before her married name. Sometimes, she even continues to go by her maiden name in records

Using Census Records—Which Ones?

- 1880 through 1930 lists the relation of each person to head of household
- Don't forget 1890 Veteran's Census Schedules
- 1850, 1860, 1870 lists everyone in household but does not indicate relationships
- 1790 through 1840 lists only the head of household—use other records to locate persons
 - Probate: often names spouse and children
 - Church records
 - Land and property records

Check Out This Idea

- Check the pages of the census before and after the page of your ancestor—you may discover other family members
 - Families tended to live close to each other
 - This technique is commonly called “cluster genealogy”
- Families in neighborhood with daughters with the same first name
- Census records showing father-in-law or mother-in-law living with family
- Sisters of one family marrying brothers of another family

Using Census Records to Find Family Names/Members

- Son, age 5 in 1860, 15 in 1870, 25 in 1880 with wife, age 22
 - Go back to 1870 and look at families in the neighborhood who have daughter, age 12, with same first name as son's wife in 1880
- Daughter, age 5 in 1860, age 15 in 1870, not with family of origin in 1880
 - Look in 1880 in the neighborhood for new family with wife age 25 having same name as daughter in previous census
 - Also look in 1870 for new husband 10 years younger living with his family of origin
- Do this for each of the siblings

Benefits to Researching All Siblings

- You will probably find out more about the family
- You may discover siblings you didn't know existed
- You may find the parents names listed on one sibling's records when they were not on your ancestor's
- First or middle names may give clues to parents' and grandparents' last names
- You get ideas for migration patterns
- It opens the door to other records, such as school, employment, wills, etc.

Final Ideas

- Create a timeline of all known members of a family
 - Include locations and dates
 - This will give you ideas for areas and records to search
- Look more than once at documents
 - You might have missed a connection the first time
- Record all findings
 - Something might be important in the future as you acquire more clues
- Think of this as a puzzle
 - Find all the pieces/clues and put them together

So, Go For It!