

Road Blocks

Where Do We Go Now?

What is a Road Block?

- A Road Block is a perceived dead-end that you have reached in your genealogical research
- Road Blocks may be small or large
- Road Blocks leave us frustrated and at a loss
- We think we may have exhausted all avenues and can go no further

But There is Hope!

Think of your challenge as a puzzle

See what pieces you already have and which are missing

1. Determine what piece of information you need to find.

-- Consider different ways to put the pieces together.

2. Revisit the data you already have and search for clues that may have been overlooked.

-- Check to see if the missing pieces might be on the table, still in the box, or on the floor

3. Identify what other sources you can research

Remember: Every ending is just a beginning!

Before You Begin

- Double-check what you have already done
 - Did you copy the information correctly—check the original record
- Go back through everything
 - When you were originally researching, a particular piece of information may not have been important then, but it is now
 - The detail you think is unimportant could be crucial
- Have you checked every available record source for the information you require?
 - Have new sources become available?
 - Educate yourself on what is available
 - Make a list of all sources you should be checking and work through the list one by one
- Is your information correct?
 - The further back we go in records, the more open to error they can be
 - Information was given by people and it is not always accurate—be flexible with dates

Remember: just because you're "sure you know" doesn't mean you have the "rest of the story"

Determine what piece of information you need to find

- Make certain you fully understand the problem you are trying to solve
- Decide what you need to do to solve the problem
- Transcribe records—this forces you to read and think about every element of the record and you can glean more when you examine the record closely
- Make a list of all the different spellings for the name you are researching and use all of them
- Keep a to-do list as ideas come to you so you remember what else you need to pursue
- Narrowing the problem into workable pieces will increase the chance of success (eg. breaking up an ancestor's life chronologically and working backward)
- Make a timeline and analyze the gaps
- Look for blank spots that need to be filled
- Creating an ancestor's biography can also show gaps in research as well as highlighting possible motivations for actions, thereby opening new areas to research
 - Of course, never make an assumption about your ancestor's behavior based upon life in the 21st century
- Think about your conclusions. Do they make sense? Think outside the box

- **Slow down, take your time and make certain you aren't being too hasty in your research and in your conclusions**

Revisit the data you already have and search for clues that may have been overlooked

- **Look over your files for items and clues you may have missed**
- **Often when you review your records, you may find something that you had forgotten or didn't have meaning before, has a new significance in light of more recent findings**
- **What record to use first is dependent upon what information has already been obtained**
- **Evaluate the results you already have**

Ideas

- **Search collateral lines, especially siblings who might have parents living with them (we then get the parents' names)**
 - **Their records may contain information or more detail than the records of your direct ancestor**
 - **Many times, siblings are godparents or witnesses on church records**
 - **Look for widowed mothers, identified as the mother-in-law of the head of household on census records—this tells you her married name, that her husband died prior to this census year, and you can look backward for her husband's information**
 - **Grandparents, aunts or uncles may be listed as godparents on church records**
 - **Remember cousins—they share the same grandparents as your ancestor and might even have a grandparent living with them**
- **A mother's maiden name may be used as the middle name for a child**
 - **Naming patterns for Spanish, Irish and other cultures:**
 - **1st son named after Father's Father; 2nd son after Mother's Father**
 - **3rd son named after Father; 4th son after Father's oldest brother**
 - **1st daughter named after Mother's Mother; 2nd after Father's Mother**
 - **3rd daughter named after Mother; 4th after Mother's oldest sister**
 - **Always look at the other people on the same page of the census and the pages before and after. Many times family members lived in the same neighborhood or just down the street**
 - **Often families emigrated in groups with cousins and neighbors from the old country and they often clung together in the new. By tracing the origin of a neighbor, you may find your family's origins.**
 - **Many of these families intermarried**
 - **Also check stepmothers and in-laws of your ancestor and their siblings to discover origins of the family**
 - **Another hint is to research business associates as they may have come from the same hometown**
 - **In-laws, friends, business associates may be sponsors or witnesses on church records—this will also help in discovering a maiden name**
 - **Visit the cemetery to see if any of these names are on stones near by your ancestor—they may be related**
 - **Use wildcards when doing searches**
 - **Search by first name only, location only, a combination or any other unique clue**
 - **Remember that dates can lie**
 - **In previous generations it was not as important as it is now for people to know their exact date of birth or age**
 - **People lied for different reasons (social, marital, military service)—many of those lies ended up in official papers**
 - **Sometimes agencies accidentally made a mistake in a vital statistic and the mistake continued in the record**
 - **Be flexible with dates; research for several years on either side of a suspected date**

- **Names and Nicknames**
 - People have nicknames and change their names throughout their lives, through marriages, adoption, divorce, legal reasons, or just because
 - There are common nicknames for popular names found in every language—learn what these were for your ancestor’s background
 - Many people don’t like their first name, so they use their middle name and this gets into official documents
 - In some cultures, siblings have the same first name so child is known by the middle name
 - Sometimes the spelling is changed by the family and sometimes by the officials, depending on what they heard or their background
- **Educate yourself about what is available online and offline**
 - By learning about a different record type that you have not worked with previously, you may discover a new resource that can open doors in your research
 - Keep a watch for new databases and finding aids as they are being developed—maybe your solution just hasn’t been created yet
- **Study history**
 - Place yourself in your ancestor’s shoes. What weather events, wars, political turmoil, economic factors, religious or racial persecution, may have affected the decisions made by your ancestors?
 - If you can’t find them in a census, check surrounding counties—maybe they left the city for the summer and were counted in another place; maybe the county boundaries changed
 - When you understand them better, your next step may be clearer

Identify what other sources you can research

- Learn about and understand what other sources may be available for the location and time period and how they are organized or indexed. (eg. birth or marriage certificates may not be available for that time period, but these records may be found through church records or family Bibles)
 - Marriage bonds, death certificates, obituaries, probate files, and cemetery information are other sources
 - Explore whether a church has its own cemetery or burial ground on site
- Research maps of your ancestor’s area
 - Property lines, town, county, state and even country boundaries have changed over time as populations grew or political authority changed hands or as your ancestor bought and sold property
 - Be sure you are researching in the right jurisdiction for that time period
- Land records (which are the most common available) may give information regarding locating a family between censuses
 - These are the first records recreated after loss due to the tax implications
 - As a corollary, check tax documents for hints on location and relationships of ancestors
- Look at estate settlements and court documents
 - Following the money disbursed may give clues to relationships
 - Adoptions, guardianships, and probate all give clues
- Check mortality schedules and state censuses (which were done between federal censuses)
 - Federal mortality schedules: 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880
 - State mortality schedules: 1855, 1865, 1875
- Search local and ethnic newspapers for information about your immigrant ancestors
 - Obituaries and other notices pertaining to life events (birth, marriage, anniversary, etc.) frequently list the town or county of origin
 - Also look at records for siblings or cousins or neighbors for more information

- Find newspapers in online collections (eg. Ancestry.com available free at Family History Centers; at local and ethnic libraries and genealogical/historical societies; at state libraries and archives)
- Other sources:
 - Published family histories and biographical sources
 - Township records, school records, and employment records
 - Land, tax, and probate records
 - Local government documents
- Post queries on message boards and mailing lists and contact others researching your line
- Ask questions of other genealogists at monthly meetings, seminars, conferences and workshops

Sources

- Red Book
 - A resource that provides county and town listings within states, including information on records and holdings for each jurisdiction. It also provides maps.
- State research outlines from the Family History Library have been retired (information now available online through Family Search Wiki)
- The Source: A Guidebook of American Genealogy
 - Information on: how to do family history research; immigration; census; military records; church records; African American and Jewish research; computer research; the American colonial era; references and guides, and more.
- Genealogical periodicals and newsletters

Think Outside the Box

- Start at home: check for family Bibles, photographs, personal papers, diaries, letters, scrapbooks, newspaper clippings, engraved pieces of jewelry
- Join a genealogy group and ask for help
- Talk to genealogy society in area ancestor was from
- If small town, visit local diner or library and ask if anyone remembers family name

Consider These Sources

- Adoption records-earlier records may not have been sealed (available at courthouses and state archives)
- Alien registration records (available at different state and national archives)
- Agricultural schedules of the census 1840-1880 (available at archives & some at FHL)
- American Medical Association-if ancestor was a doctor; records back to early 1800s (available at FHL)
- American State Papers-land claims (available at HB Library)
- Biographies and Autobiographies (available at genealogical libraries and historical societies)
- Fraternal organization records (local libraries & historical societies may have old records)
- Emigration records from the country of origin (available at FHL and Ancestry.com)
- Homestead records (available at National Archives)
- Land grants & patents (available at www.glorerecords.blm.gov and at state archives)
- City, county, rural directories (available larger public libraries & state archives)
- School censuses & records, especially college & university (available at local board of education, county clerk's offices, historical societies, local and state archives, institutions involved)
- Voter registration records (available county offices & state archives & larger libraries)
- Veteran's Schedules of the Census, especially 1890 (available National Archives; Ancestry.com; 1890 indexes available FHL & larger genealogical libraries)
- Territorial records & censuses (available at libraries & National Archives)
- Passport records (available National Archives, FHL, Ancestry.com & Fold3)
- Patent records (searchable database: <http://www.uspto.gov/patft>)
- Prison records, prior to 1920 (available at correctional facility; state department of corrections; state or local archives)
- Occupational records & employment applications (available through companies or libraries, archives and historical societies)

- Foreign birth, marriage & death records for U.S. citizens (available at National Archives)
- Delayed birth records for births during mid to late 1800s and early 1900s. Individuals born before issuance of birth certificates may have applied for delayed birth certificates to document age for social security, passport application, etc.
- Draft records for Civil War, WWI & WWII (available FHL, Fold3 & National Archives)
- Marriage dispensations (available at religious headquarters, diocese or state or federal archives)
- Midwife records (some available at FHL)
- Licenses
 - Marriage-these date back to the latter half of the 19th century (available at the County in which the marriage took place)
 - Medical, teachers, lawyers-some date back to the late 1800s (available some state and county archives & AMA for medical, NEA for teachers, and ABA for lawyers)
- Soldier's & Sailor's Homes, VA Homes records (check state archives)
- Insurance or other benefits (usually located in county in which individual filed the application)
- Post Office Guides, Directories & Records-can be helpful in circumstances where only the street address is known or in determining the location of a town that no longer exists (available at National Archives and some at FHL)
 - Ancestors who were Postmasters: 1789-1971 (information in appointment registers available at National Archives and FHL)
- Railroad records-information, including employment files, pension files, land acquisition schedules that list landowner, date & cost of acquisition & parcel of land involved; land field notes that include names of owners of property adjacent to the Railroad right of way; life insurance claims of employees & claims related to services on military RRs from 1861 to 1870 (records available at National Archives & FHL; also museums, research libraries & historical societies. Not all places have all records but each has some)
- Court records
 - Probate
 - Name change
 - Bankruptcy
 - Divorce
 - Guardianship
 - Naturalization
 - Land dispute

Final Thoughts

- Go through your research material thoroughly at least once a year
 - This takes advantage of the way your brain and awareness levels change with time and experience
 - Maybe something will be available that wasn't there a year ago
- Keep an open mind
 - You never know what you will find when or where, so avoid going in with assumptions or expectations
 - If you narrow your focus, you may miss the details that will answer questions later down your research path
- Make lots of notes
 - Keep track of what you find and where; document all sources
 - Make yourself a reminder to follow up on ALL the details, not just the one you are currently tracking down
 - Remember: If you keep looking at things as a road block, you might miss the detour or alternate route right next to it

With patience and persistence, your puzzles will be solved and you will work around your road blocks! Here's to Success!!!