



A Pro's Strategies for Mid-19th Century U.S. Research: A Case Study

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INTRODUCTION

The objective of this course is to take a mid-19th century U.S. research problem and review strategies for solving the problem. You will get an “inside” look at how a professional researcher 1) analyzes a problem, 2) decides which sources to search, 3) organizes the research and 4) continues to do this to solve the problem.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

Have a clearly stated research objective such as “Find the parents of William H. Morehead”.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Carefully review documents from previous research for two reasons. To refresh the problem in your mind and to watch for additional clues you may have missed previously.

For this problem, it was:

- *U.S. National Homes for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, 1866-1938* database at Ancestry.com
- 1900 US Federal Census of St. Louis
- 1880 US Federal Census of Cold Spring, Shelby County, Illinois
- Review of all Moreheads (and variants) living in Shelby County
- Illinois Statewide Marriage Index

STRATEGY

There usually is not “one true strategy” that is going to give you success. Most likely a variety of searches will be needed to gather evidence which must constantly be weighed against other evidence. In the case of the William H. Morehead family, the following searches were used:

- 1870 Census of Illinois, likely Shelby County.
 - Using variant spellings and a variety of searches William was not found.
 - A list of the Moreheads also failed to list Reuben.
 - A Jacob and Nancy Morehead family was living in Ridge Township and an apparent

- widow Nancy was living with her family in Rose Township
- It was also noted that all of the married women were recorded as “Mrs.” with ditto under the surname. In other words, their given names failed to be listed. A quick survey of other townships indicates that this is the case for as much as half the county this census year.
 - A second index (and transcript) to the 1870 Census for Shelby County had been published in book form and searched.
 - Rubin Morehead in Windsor Township noted but not William or even the widow Nancy noted in the Ancestry index above. A review of the Ancestry index showed that he was indexed as “Morehead Ruben”, with his given name listed as his surname.
 - A search for William Morehead in Illinois born within 5 years of 1843 uncovered one in Knox County that could not have been ancestral.
 - Marriage records for Shelby County using the State of Illinois free statewide marriage index for all pre-1900 marriages.
 - Morehead and variants.
 - The marriages of Jacob, Reuben and William H. were noted.
 - The earliest marriage in the county was for Ephraim Moorehead to Elizabeth Deeds in 1842.
 - State Archives of Illinois online a collection of death record indexes pre-1916 and 1916 to 1950. This included records from Shelby County from December, 1877 through 1950.
 - From Shelby County was for Eliza Jane Morehead in 1910 (perhaps Reuben’s wife?)
 - Three more including Reuben Ewing Morehead who died 23 March 1928.
 - Death certificates for the State of Illinois have been microfilmed up to 1950
 - Reuben was born 16 August 1842 in Illinois, the son of Jacob Morehead of Kentucky. His mother’s name and birthplace were unknown. The information was provided by Mrs. Ida Remer of Shelbyville.
 - Original marriage records for Shelby County to learn if the original record provided more information than the online index.
 - Two for a Jacob Morehead/Moorehead.
 - The marriage of William H. Morehead to Mary Ann Thompson
 - The marriage of Reuben E. Morehead to Jane Rose.
 - Search of donor submitted pedigrees was conducted to determine if someone had previously solved the problem.
 - Ancestry’s *World Tree Project* listed William H. Morehead as the son of an “Unknown” Morehead of Kentucky.
 - 1860 Census for Moreheads in Shelby County.
 - Three Morehead references were found, including our William indexed as “Wm Morehea”, Jacob and Reuben.
 - 1850 Census search for Moreheads living in Shelby County, Illinois found
 - Only one, a Jacob Morehead, indexed as “Jas C” residing with an Allen Francisco family. His age was confusing as both a 12 and 10 were listed in the box. His relationship to our Morehead family was unclear.
 - Search for William, this time using the search criteria “Wm Moreh*” living in Illinois and born within 5 years of 1842.
 - The family seems to disintegrate sometime after the birth of our William H. and perhaps Reuben as none are with their parents in 1850, yet in 1860, both William and Reuben can be shown to be with family.

- The 1840 Census in Illinois searched for Moreheads (including variants).
 - Moultrie County was not created until 1843, from Shelby and Macon Counties.
- Index to the state and federal censuses of 1810, 1818, 1820, 1825, 1830, 1835, 1840, 1845, 1850, 1855; executive record to 1861; election returns of 1818-1847; House and Senate journals through 1830's; early laws to 1849; and part of the Perrin Collection on microfilm searched for all Moreheads/Mooreheads.
 - Two additional Morehead groups appeared in Moultrie County in 1850.
- The 1840 Census at Ancestry checked again for Ephraim.
 - According to the *Name Index to Early Illinois Records*, Ephraim should have been located on page 191.
 - A review of the digital images failed to show the page 191 in Shelby County that was recorded on the index card though pages 190 and 192 were found.
- The 1840 Census on microfilm searched.

Locality			1840, Shelby County, Illinois											
Pg.	Head of Family		0-4	5-9	10-14	15-20	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80+	Slaves
191	Ephraim	M	1						1					
	Morehead	F	1	1			1							

- Shelby County, Illinois page 191 was located as was Ephraim Morehead as follows: Ephraim was involved in manufacture and trade, one of only four on the page. The rest were involved in farming.
- The entries fit perfect for what is almost certainly the composition of the ancestral family at that time. Each person can be tentatively identified based on age information

Gender	Age	Proposed Person	Expected Age from Records
Male	40-50	Ephraim Morehead	Unknown
Female	20-30	"Mrs. Morehead"	Unknown
Female	5-10	Catharine Morehead	5-7 years old (age 17 in 1850)
Male	0-5	Jacob Morehead	2-4 (age 10 or 12 in 1850, 24 in 1860)
Female	0-5	Sarah Morehead	3 (age 13 in 1850)

from the 1850 and 1860 Censuses as follows: Our William H. and also Reuben would have been born after the 1840 Census

- It seems likely that something happened to Ephraim before 1850 to cause the breakup of the children. In order to explain the 1842 marriage to Elizabeth Deeds, it also appears that the woman listed in the 1840 Census above may have died, resulting in a second marriage.
- Names on either side of Ephraim Morehead in the 1840 Census in Shelby County checked in the 1850 Census
 - Samuel Wright and Jacob McCune could be traced to page 369a and 369b respectively in Moultrie County in 1850.
 - This places Ephraim in the exact same location as the Elizabeth Morehead family (p. 364), Catharine (p. 369a), Sarah (p. 364).
- The 1860 Census for Elizabeth Morehead, possible widow.

- She was located in Moultrie County as a 43 year old “weaveress” born in Ohio. Her personal estate value was \$400 and she was unable to read or write. Her post office was Sullivan, Illinois.
- She was living in the same neighborhood as 1850 and as Ephraim in 1840 as Jacob McCune was found on the next page and a James Young, her neighbor in 1850, was on the preceding page.
- A county map of Illinois as of 1840 was obtained.
 - The Morehead/Mooreheads in Illinois were plotted on the map and only Ephraim was within 30 miles.
- A map of Shelby and Moultrie County townships shows that Sullivan Township, Moultrie County where Ephraim likely lived and Windsor Township, Shelby County, where Catharine and William H. were, border each other. This provides further evidence that Ephraim was the father of this family.
- The *Illinois Statewide Marriage Index, 1763 – 1900* consulted for all Morehead/Mooreheads across Illinois.
 - The most critical marriage uncovered was another marriage for Ephraim Morehead, this to Polly Street in Montgomery County in 1833.
- It appears likely that Polly died after the 1840 Census but before Ephraim married again in October, 1842 to Elizabeth Deeds. He then died before 1850.
- State of Illinois’ *Illinois Civil War Muster and Descriptive Rolls Database* with details as to soldier's name; rank; age; height; colors of eyes, hair, and complexion; occupation; marital status; birthplace; residence; date, place, and term of enrollment; name of individual who enrolled soldier; date and place of muster into service; name of mustering officer; date and place of muster out; name of mustering-out officer; and remarks concerning transfers, promotions, injuries, or special duty.
 - Entries for Reuben E. and William H. Morehead identified in more detail.
 - Both William and Reuben first mustered in to the 41st Illinois U.S. Infantry on 6 August 1861 at Decatur, Illinois. Both were from Sullivan, Moultrie County, were 18 years of age, 5 feet 6 inches tall, with dark eyes and a dark complexion. Both were also natives of Shelby County, Illinois, confirming that they were in Shelby County as of 1842/3, depending on their birthdays. It’s possible they were twins since they are consistently so close in age.
 - Both William and Reuben E. muster back in on 18 February 1865 at Shelbyville into the 14th Illinois US Infantry. Their ages are now 21 years old, they are both still 5 feet 6 inches tall with dark complexions. They both mustered out in Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas on 16 September 1865. The fact that they muster in together twice strengthens the argument that they were brothers.
- State of Illinois database soldier’s homes residents.
 - Case file can be ordered from the State of Illinois. The record may contain: veteran’s name, age, birthplace, residence, physical features, enlistment record, and nature of any disability; certificate of service; hospital surgeon’s report; death certificate; will of deceased veteran; inventory of personal effects; and correspondence concerning veteran’s admission to and activities while at the home.
- *A Historic Sketch and Biographical Album of Shelby County, Illinois* did not mention the Morehead family but did contain brief sketches on the 41st, 126th and 14th Illinois U.S. Infantries served in by our William H. Morehead.
- The U.S. Census mortality schedules for 1850, 1860, 1870 and 1880 were extracted and

published in book form for Shelby County.

- A three month old Sarah Rose was noted just above, in household #12 of Ridge Township. A check of the 1870 Census showed that this was the infant daughter of John and Sallie (Sarah) Morehead Rose.
- A ten volume series of cemetery inscriptions covering Shelby County searched.
 - In Antioch Cemetery, for Jacob Morehead, born 1841 and died 1877. Although his birth year is later than expected, based on all previous research, it is probably Jacob who appears as a single man in the 1850 and 1860 Censuses of Shelby County.
- Map book of cemetery locations in Shelby consulted.
- A list of *Veteran's Buried in Shelby County, Illinois* searched.
 - The deaths of Thomas E. Morehead above as well as our Reuben Morehead identified.
- *Civil War Pension Index: General Index to Pension Files, 1861-1934* checked.
 - William began claiming an invalid pension in 1868 and Reuben in 1899.
- Ephraim Morehead "Google" search.
 - Located an Ancestry message board inquiry into the burial of our Catharine Morehead Davis in Wallis Cemetery (Windsor Township).
 - A further inquiry was made regarding Ephraim and his possible relationship to an Enoch Morehead of Rutherford County, North Carolina.
- Donor-submitted family tree databases at Ancestry checked again.
 - Reference to Ephraim Morehead of Rutherford County, North Carolina. It was indicated that he was born about 1792, the son of James Alexander and Millie Morehead of Dunfermline, [Fife County], Scotland.
- The 1830 Census searched for all Ephraim Moreheads in the United States.
 - Two were found, one in Virginia and the other in Rutherford County, North Carolina.

RESULTS

This research period was successful in:

- 1) Establishing Ephraim as the father of William H. Morehead through combined indirect evidence. His mother was likely Polly Street
- 2) Locating possible family origins in North Carolina and Scotland.

NEXT STEPS

1. Follow-up on clues from the Soldiers' and Sailors' Home and Civil War Pension Records.
2. William H. and Thomas E. Morehead buried in Harmon Cemetery, Lakewood Township should be pursued, including information on Thomas' service in the 14th Illinois regiment.
3. Shelby County probate records need to be searched along with land records for clues regarding Ephraim's death and also his arrival into the county.
4. Moultrie County, which was created in 1843, should also be searched for pertinent records up to 1870 so that his wife Elizabeth can be tracked.
5. The death of William's sibling Sarah should be pursued as well as records relating to the Elizabeth Morehead and children Elizabeth and Mary in the 1850 Census in Moultrie. If

Sarah, Elizabeth and Mary live a long time, like Reuben, death certificates may be available, providing additional insights into their parentage.

6. Research should then pursue the Ephraim Morehead in Rutherford County, North Carolina to determine if he can be connected to our Ephraim in Illinois.
7. Because of the commonness of the Mary Thompson name, our Mary Ann should not be pursued until the Civil War pension record of William is ordered. Documentation of pension payments should be obtainable to determine where William was and when. This would help us locate potential death and burial information on William and Mary Ann. Also, affidavits of William's invalid condition may have been provided by Mary Ann's family giving additional clues as to her origins.

LESSONS

There several lessons learned from this case study that are important to remember as you pursue your goal:

- Spellings – Do not fall into the spellings trap. In this case, the surname **Morehead** was found in the variants: Morhead, Moorhead, Moorehead,
- Don't put your ancestor in a cage: Our ancestors were much more connected than we often give them credit for.
- There is often more than one census index for a place. If you cannot find them, search multiple indexes.
- Pay attention to friends and neighbors, people your ancestor would have associated with.
- Don't ignore anyone with the same surname living in the same area.
- Pay attention to what is happening on the census page. Remember "Mrs."
- Be careful to continue to use broader area searches in case you are surprised by a find and to also demonstrate why research should stay focused in an area.
- Pay attention to the marriages of the women. Your male ancestor probably had sisters.
- Search for online databases available from the State Archives.
- Search for the marriage and death records of possible siblings. If they name parents, it as good as them naming your ancestor's parents.
- Always check the original record.
- Never forget to return to compiled sources as you learn more about your family.
- Search censuses backwards and forward. When you find someone in an earlier census, search for them in newer ones.
- Use wildcards in your searches.
- Always use maps of your research area that show the places as they were when your ancestor lived there.
- Understand the history of your area. Remember, counties split!
- Search and review published histories for the area your ancestor lived. Many were published right around 1876.
- Digital databases can be missing information. You may have to re-do some things the old-fashioned way.
- Military records can provide a wealth of information. Also, for an ancestor in the

- military, learn about the group they were with. It can really bring an ancestor to life.
- Different records types often contain different little bits of information. Search them all.
 - Try a generic “Google” search for your ancestor and place using a variety of search terms. You never know what you might stumble on to.

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