



Tips for Successful Searching on FamilySearch.org

David Rencher gave a lecture at National Genealogical Society in 2013 titled: *Mining the Data*. The following is from his syllabus:

Collect ALL the data available – period – end of sentence!

Data is power and in tackling genealogical research problems, you need multiple reference points to correlate and validate your conclusions. If done correctly, additional data discovered later should add to, not detract from your conclusion – there should be little reasonable doubt when you are through.

Changes are made to FamilySearch frequently. Those changes can be accessed in three locations: (1) Blog (bottom of website in small gray letters) shows changes that have been made or will shortly be made posted at least once a month. Some are titled “What New” others have titles that show changes; (2) Get Help > What’s New (summaries from past two months of blog posts; (3) Family Tree > “What’s New” pertains strictly to changes to Family Tree.


Change in Search Methods

- Formerly, too much information eliminated records that did not contain all in search query
- Results now show records that show only part of information in query
- Example: Can now show birth state and receive SSDI results
- Example: Can now include birth date and receive marriage records where age was not included

Any record in FamilySearch’s 2055 (6 Jan 2016) collections can be found if a few searching tips and tricks are used.

How to Search

FamilySearch has records that span billions of names across hundreds of collections, including birth, marriage, death, census, and other original records. Most of these records are indexed, so you can search for records that identify your ancestors.



Frequently Asked Questions

▲ Close

Top 10 Frequently Asked Questions

- [Restrictions on viewing an image in historical records](#)
- [Searching historical records by place](#)
- [Applying filters to search results in Historical Records](#)
- [FamilySearch partner websites](#)
- [Online books on FamilySearch.org](#)
- [United States Mormon Battalion Pension Applications, 1846-1923 known issues](#)
- [Avoiding printing a partial image on FamilySearch.org](#)
- [Printing, downloading, or copying information from Ancestry.com](#)
- [Printing, downloading, or copying information from MyHeritage](#)
- [Printing, downloading, or copying information from AmericanAncestors.org](#)

Tip 1:
Online
Search
Resources
Get Help >
Help Center
> Search

Tip 2: Sign In

Many copyright [Sign In | Join For Free](#) owners will not allow access to their data unless the user has signed in to FamilySearch. There is no cost to registration or access to the website. One of the stated purposes for FamilySearch is to provide access to data at no charge to the user.

Tip 3: Wildcards

There is no minimum letters needed, but the more letters used, the closer the results will be to the desired name. Wildcards may be used for the first letter of the name. Wildcards are allowed for person's names only.

? – may be substituted for 1 letter, and one letter is required for replacement.

* – may be substituted for 0 – unlimited letters, which can be a help, but can also add more letters than desired

Tip 4: Parent Search

- Search using father's name and mother's given name
- Search using father's surname and mother's maiden name
- Search using father's name and mother's given & maiden name
- Search using father's name only
- Search using mother's name (with maiden name)
- Search using mother's name (with married name)

Tip 5: Spouse Search

- Search with spouse's name only
- Search with wife's name – if married before search with 1st marriage surname
- Using the spouse's name as the only search criterion may be more successful than in combination with the primary desired person.

Tip 6: Restrict Records By:

The image shows a search filter interface titled "Restrict records by:". Below the title are four tabs: "Location", "Type", "Batch Number", and "Film Number". The "Location" tab is selected. Under this tab, there are two input fields: "Country" and "State or Province". The "Country" field is active and contains a text cursor. Below these fields is a checkbox labeled "Match all terms exactly".

Restrict records by:

Location | Type | Batch Number | Film Number

Country State or Province

☐ Match all terms exactly

Search results may be restricted by:

Location – country and state or province (can be *very* helpful if looking for information from only one country and/or one state or province). When using filters (See Tip 9) records may be narrowed, in most instances, to the desired county.

Tip 7: Record Type:

Search by record type most likely to provide the desired information.

Type	
<input type="checkbox"/> Birth, Baptism, and Christenings	<input type="checkbox"/> Immigration and Naturalization
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Marriage	<input type="checkbox"/> Military
<input type="checkbox"/> Death	<input type="checkbox"/> Probate
<input type="checkbox"/> Census, Residence, and Lists	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

Tips 8: Film Number:

Restrict records by:

Location | Type | Batch Number | Film Number

Data has been extracted from some films and may be searched for names located on a specific film number. 1860 censuses are not indexed by county only by state. Most of 1870 states are also not indexed by county. FamilySearch catalog shows a listing for FHL numbers for federal census. Familysearch.org > Search > Catalog > United States > Census > 1860 or 1870 Census > "The 1860 (or 1870) census register. The register may be downloaded or viewed online.

FamilySearch Catalog: Can view and/or search films that are posted online, when this

Notes

Arkansas, County Marriages are available online, click [here](#).

image is viewed, scroll down to the film description & number area

Film Notes				
NOTE	LOCATION	COLLECTION/SHELF	FILM/DGS	FORMAT
Marriage record Indexes 1911-1922	Family History Library	United States & Canada Film	1034909 Items 1-2	
Marriage record Index 1930-1941	Family History Library	United States & Canada Film	2020345 Item 1	
Colored marriage record 1868-1876 (Also contains Abstract of treasurers receipts for delinquent lands 1880)	Family History Library	United States & Canada Film	1034247 Item 6	
Marriage record v. A 1845-1856	Family History Library	United States & Canada Film	1034247 Item 7	
Marriage record v. B-C 1856-1872	Family History Library	United States & Canada Film	1034248 Items 4-5	
Marriage record v. D-F 1872-1880	Family History Library	United States & Canada Film	1034249	
Marriage record v. F-H 1880-1887	Family History Library	United States & Canada Film	1034250	
Marriage record v. I-J 1887-1895	Family History Library	United States & Canada Film	1034251	
Marriage record v. J-K 1891-1898	Family History Library	United States & Canada Film	1034252	

Depending on the combinations of the icons below determines how best to obtain information. For more information: <https://familysearch.org/blog/en/viewerupdate/>



Film has been indexed, may or may not include image with indexed data



Images are available online, may or may not be available through indexed data



Film can be ordered

Filter your results by:
[Learn more](#)

Collections

Birthplace

Birth Year

Marriage Place

Marriage Year

Residence Place

Residence Year

Death Place

Death Year

Other Place

Other Year

Gender

Tip 9: Use Filters

Start with a global search entering minimal information (such as surname only) then click on the ▼. It will raise a set of filters.

[Refine your search](#) ▼

This set of filters will restrict results to match the specific criterion that has

been selected. Many have felt the frustration of researching for information from one state or time period and getting results that do not match the requested information. This set of filters eliminates that problem.

☐ Lock filters ←

☐ Match all terms exactly

[Search](#)

If *any* change in the original data entered in the global search will erase all filters selected from this set, unless the “Lock Filters” box is selected

When filters have been selected for specific data, such as a marriage in a specific location, it will not keep other data involving the search person from other record types and locations. (i.e. marriage

information requested in a specific place and time limit, may still allow the name in the search to show as the parent of a deceased child in another time period and place.)

Tip 10: Variation of Name Spelling

FamilySearch’s set of name variations on which it searches can be found at:

labs.familysearch.org > Standard Finder

Standard Finder

Standard Finder provides access to standardized information for names, locations, and dates. These databases are used by several FamilySearch applications to assist researchers in searching for exact spellings as well as for indexers who enter information used for Historical Record Search.

Standard FINDER

Name Date Place Preview Resources

ame Culture (optional)
ens skousen Denmark

[Clear](#) [Search](#)

Or-

reflexes First names Last names Suffixes

jens skousen

[Clear](#) [Search](#)

Prefix	Variants: First name	Variants: Last name	Suffix
gan, gean, gen, genes, genest, genis, genisio, genius, gens, gheen, gian, ginz, iens, jen, jens, jense, jersen, jenselius, jensirius, jenspeter, jons, jhn, jin, jinn, yens	cho, choe, chou, chow, schau, schauen, schauerin, schauv, schauw, schav, schaw, schawe, schawo, schewe, schewerin, schewes, scho, schoe, schoeh, schoew, schoewe, schou, schousen, schouw, schouw, schow, schowe, schowsen, schoy, schui, schuy, skow, scou, scov, scow, scowes, scoy, shaw, shawa, shawe, shawes, shews, shos, shoe, show, showe, skau, skauge, skaugen, skausen, skav, skave, skaw, skog, skogen, skogg, skogh, skojen, skog, skou, skoug, skougson, skous, skousen, skouson, skouv, skouw, skov, skove, skovsen, skow, skowsen, skoy, zschau		

This site will show the variation in spellings of names on which it searches. i.e., for the name Roberson, it searches on a large variety of spellings, but does not include Robinson, which is one of the main mistakes in spelling and indexing, which shows that a separate search for the family for the name Robinson to make a complete search for information for the family.

Tip 11: Name Search Tactics

- Search variations on given name of target person
- Search using given name only – then restrict to location, time period & record type
- Search using given name only with life details
- Search using last name only – then restrict to location, time period & record type
- Search using last name only with life details

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- Search for other members of the family
- Search for all life details, in probable locations without a name.

Barbara Renick's excellent handout with additional information on search variations can be found in her *Eleven Layers of Online Searches at FamilySearch.org*:

http://s3.amazonaws.com/rootstech/original/RENICK_Eleven_Layers_at_FamilySearch_2013.pdf?1359567916



Tip 12: Use Collections Feature

After using the filtering features, the Collections search narrows to the specific record and information desired. Be aware of Collections that would be of benefit to your research plan.

Tip 13: Always look at the Image, if available

The index is not perfect and does not contain all the information available in the original record. IF the image is available, examine *all* data on the record.



Tip 14: Do not overlook the Browse Images

Way-Pointing is the name given to the process of grouping images for better accessibility. Browse images are in smaller groups of images than are on microfilm reels. While the images cannot be accessed through an index, they are identified in groups. Some of the records have internal indexes.

Find a Browse Collection of interest and see how it is broken down in groups.

For further information see the following syllabi from RootsTech 2015

Using FamilySearch to Solve Genealogical Problems:

https://rootstech.org/bc/content/pdfs/Class-Syllabus/RootsTech/RT1498_UsingFamilySearchToSolveGenealogicalProblems_Ison.pdf?lang=eng

A Billion+ Hidden Records on FamilySearch:

https://rootstech.org/bc/content/pdfs/Class-Syllabus/Computer-Lab/LAB1156_ABillion+HiddenRecordsOnFamilySearch_Raymond.pdf?lang=eng