

Maximizing Ancestry.com

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Searching

- Start with a simple search in all the categories:
 - NAME (try all spelling variations)
 - BIRTHDATE (use ranges)
 - BIRTHPLACE (use dropdown locations)
- **Don't use death dates unless you are searching for death records. Death dates will exclude some records.**
- See what records appear for your ancestor at the top of your search.
- Rotate pieces of information about your ancestor in and out of your search
- A good start for reconstructing the foundation of an ancestor's life will include the following records:
 - BIRTH RECORDS
 - MARRIAGE RECORDS
 - ANY APPLICABLE CENSUS RECORDS
 - DEATH RECORDS
- See where your gaps are and do a more focused search.
 - Category Search
 - Location Search
 - Search for other family members
- Very often vital records are not digitized or made available online by government offices.
- Be sure to read the record information and the source information on the record.
- Don't confuse indices for records.
- Always print out, record, or download the source information for the record.
- Make note of what search criteria you used to find the record.
- If you have changed the Collection Priority/Focus settings remember to reset them for your next search. These settings remain the same from search to search.

Advanced Searching Techniques

Ancestry.com has over 10 billion records in its database and 20 million family trees. You must target your searches so your ancestor's records rise to the top of the results list.

Spelling and Indexing Issues

- Consider all spelling variations for your ancestor's surname and given name. Use <http://www.namethesaurus.com/Thesaurus/Search.aspx> for ideas for additional variations.

- Remember to use the country of origin spelling for both your ancestor's surname and given name. (e.g. Carpenter = Zimmerman, Joseph = Giuseppe). Many people kept the original spelling of their names for 10 years or more, before changing it to sound or appear more American/English. Use Google Translate or <http://www.behindthename.com> for help.
- Use **Wild Cards** to find multiple spelling variations within one search.
 - The “?” symbol replaces 1 character.
 - The “*” symbol replaces 0 to 5 characters (but the name must have at least 3 other letters in it for this to work).
 - Under the default settings, you must select “Exact Spelling” to activate the wildcards.

Expand or Contract the Focus of Your Search

- Geographically
- Topically - Record type
- By time period (sometimes you need to broaden your search – use time ranges)
- By record collection - using the Ancestry.com Card Catalogue
- You can also use the sort function for categories v. records

Location Search

- Do a location search to eliminate records and record collections that are not applicable to your ancestor – found at the bottom of the main Search page (example: country, state, county).
- While in the Advanced Search mode, adjusting the default settings to “exact” under the Location box will eliminate records that do not have your ancestor's exact location. (Be careful using this method).

Adjust the Time Period of the Search

- Use ranges for dates.
- While in the Advanced Search mode, adjusting the default settings to “exact” under the year box will eliminate records that do not have your ancestor's exact year of birth/marriage/etc. (Be careful using this method).

Special Collection Search

- Do a search by special collection on the lower right side of the main Search page to target a particular record collection group (Military, Immigration, etc.).

Search Filters

- Allow you to narrow the results of your search by type of record and sometimes time period within that record type.

Card Catalogue for Record Collections/Databases

- Search the Ancestry.com record collection/databases by title or keyword.
- If you search in the title box, you need to use a word that would appear in the title of the record collection/database.
- If you search in the keyword box, you need to use a word that would appear in the description of the record collection/database.
- Find a record collection/database by geographic location, time period or record type.
- The results of your record collection/database search can be sorted by popularity, database title, date updated, date added to collection and record count.

Categories/Records

- This sort function allows you look at the results of your search sorted either by record relevance or by the category of the record.

Searching for Ancestors with a Common Name

- Consider what is unique about your ancestor and incorporate those elements into your search (e.g. occupation, address, family composition).
- Search without the surname.

- Search another family member that might be living with or near your relative.

Family Tree Building and Organizing Records

Family Tree Views

- The **Pedigree View** allows you to see more generations on one page, but it only shows the parent-to-child relationships and does not include any siblings.
- The **Family Group View** allows you to see all the members of a family but takes up much more screen space. This is the best view to use when you are checking your work after adding individuals to your tree, or after you have attached documents (particularly census records) to your tree.

Tree Pages

- **Tree Overview** has headers that allow you to see a collective view of the number of people, photographs, hints, records, media images, videos, etc. in your tree. It also shows you the people you have invited to see your tree. This is also the place where you can manage the people you have invited to share your tree.
- **Media Gallery** shows you all the media (pictures/records) you have uploaded to your tree.
- **Tree Settings** is where you can set and adjust the privacy settings for your particular tree.
- **Facebook Import** is the Facebook portal.
- **Tree Sharing** is where you can invite family and friends to share your tree.

Adding and Deleting Information to and from Your Tree

- Almost all of the information (records, pictures, etc.) you will be adding to or deleting from your tree will happen through a family member's **Profile page** while in the **Facts**, **Gallery** or **Hints** sections. The other major area where you will add information is in the **Search** mode when you are looking for new records.
- Attach a record to an individual in your tree as soon as you have verified it is applicable to your family. If you are not sure of the record validity put it in your **Shoebox**. You can review it later when you have more time or additional information.
- When you attach a record/document to a family member in your tree, Ancestry's algorithm is not always able to include all the valuable pieces of information from a **Source** to your ancestor's **Facts** box. But later you can add valuable information to your ancestor's **Facts** by using the edit button in the upper right corner of the **Facts** box. This can really add clarity to an ancestor's **Facts** timeline. (For example: including the house number and street name in a Residence Fact or the ancestor's occupation from a city directory **Source**).
- You can add media to a person's **Profile** page through any **Facts** box, **Source** box or through the **Gallery** section.
- When you upload pictures or other media don't to forget to include their **Source** citation.
- Change or edit family members in the **Family** add box or the **Edit** box in top right corner of the **Profile Fact** page.

Learning and Support

For every hour you spend actively learning how to better use Ancestry.com, you will save yourself 3 to 5 hours in wasted search time.

Ancestry.com Learning Center - <http://www.ancestry.com/cs/learning/Home>

Ancestry.com has removed the Learning Center from their menu options, so to find the Learning Center page you have to use a link or search in Google.

- **Start with Pen and Pencil** has free downloadable charts and forms. (These forms are also available in the Support Center under Lesson 1, Building Your Family Tree, Gathering Information.)
- **Free Research Guides** for different ethnic groups and topics can be found on the Learning Center home page.

- **Ancestry Wiki** (found on the front page of the Learning Center) – You should always start here before you start researching in a new geographic location or a new record group. It tells you what records are available and where.

Ancestry.com Support Center (found under the Help menu box)

- The **Support Center** has areas of interest to browse for help articles to use Ancestry.com. If you don't see your topic you can use a keyword or ask a question in the search box. Also, you can submit a question to the Ancestry Support Community.

Ancestry Academy (found under the Extras menu bar)

- Contains different genealogy courses you can take. However, unless you have the “All Access” Ancestry.com subscription many of these classes come with an additional charge. I would recommend you take advantage of all the free instructional videos, webinars and tutorials first. You can also track the courses you have already taken.

YouTube (found on the Internet) Free Ancestry.com videos are on YouTube.

Collaborating and Sharing

Community (found under the Help Menu Bar)

- **Member Connect** allows you to find other Ancestry.com members who are also researching your ancestor.
- **Public Member Trees** puts you in contact with other members researching your ancestors. Never believe anything you see in someone else's tree until you verify the information.
- **Member Directory** lets you look up other members, but you must have their exact user name or email address.
- **Message Boards** allow you to post brief messages requesting information on a person, family or a specific topic.

Sharing your tree (found under Tree Pages)

- You can share your tree with anyone. They do not have to be a subscriber to Ancestry.com. Go to Tree Pages and click on the last drop down menu item - Sharing your tree. You can invite people through email or through Ancestry.com.

When all else fails, call the Ancestry toll free number: 1 800 262 3787.

Now go have a genealogy adventure!