



Tips and Tricks

Using FamilySearch Historical Records Collection

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FamilySearch is a free website dedicated to helping people identify their ancestors. Currently there are more than 2.5 million rolls of microfilmed records from countries all over the world available at the Family History Library and many are available at FamilySearch Centers worldwide. Staff and volunteers are working to digitize the microfilm collection as well as capture additional digital images of records housed in libraries and archives throughout the world.

There are more than two thousand digital collections available online at FamilySearch. Many of the collections are indexed, some are unindexed. The FamilySearch Indexing program has a large volunteer workforce helping to index the records.

This presentation will demonstrate how to search the indexed collections and browse the unindexed collections. Unindexed digital collections can be an effective way to find additional information about an ancestor.

Basic Factors

Three main search criteria are coordinating factors in identifying ancestors: Name, Place, and Date. No one person can be in more than one place at one time. Names, places, and dates must converge to produce valid identity or valid results.

Biggest TIP of All: You need a fact for each one of the search criteria to be most successful finding ancestors in Historical Records: Name; Place; Date.

Name

TIPS:

- A person may use several variations of his/her given name during a lifetime, at times using first name, middle name or even initials.
- Surnames have many variant spellings depending on time, place, and other circumstances.

TRICKS:

- Consider appropriate name variations according to time and place. Try searches using these and other variations.
- Searching with common misspellings of the name is a good strategy.
- It is helpful to create a list of variant spellings and have it handy. Keep an open mind.
- Use alternate websites to get ideas for possible name variants – e.g. <http://forebears.io/surnames>.

- Use the * wildcard to replace vowels or consonants to search for possible variant name spellings: Question mark (?) replaces one character; Asterisk (*) replaces zero or more characters.
- Use additional names in the “other” category on the Historical Records search page.

Place

TIPS:

- Place names may have changed over time for various historical and political reasons.
- Sometimes the spelling of a place was not accurately recorded.

TRICKS:

- Consider appropriate name variations according to time and place.
- Use the * wildcard to replace vowels or consonants to search for possible variant place name spellings.
- Use alternate websites to get ideas for possible place name variants – e.g. fuzzy gazetteer at <http://isodp.hof-university.de/fuzzyg/query/>

Date

TIPS:

- Dates are often recorded in a variety of ways and with varying accuracy. Sometimes different calendar systems are used – e.g. the Napoleonic calendar.
- A person’s age will vary depending on the time of year a record was created.
- Sometimes historical records may be off by a year or more from the date the you have in your family records.
- Birthdays were not as celebrated as they are today. It was not uncommon for a person to be unaware of his/her exact birthday.

TRICKS:

- Using a date range is helpful. Enter a year range from 5 to ten years to include any possible date variations.
- Use other websites for information about possible historical, political calendric variances.

FamilySearch Historical Records

Indexed Records

FamilySearch has many collections that are indexed, or name searchable. When searching in Historical Records from the main page titled “Search Historical Records” you are searching indexed records only.

Go to www.familysearch.org From the home page choose “Search.” Clicking on Search opens the Historical Records search page. From this page, there are four ways to begin searching indexed collections:

1. Search Historical Records
2. Research By Location
3. Find a Collection

4. Browse all published collections

1. Search Historical Records

To begin using Search Historical Records, use the data entry boxes under Search Historical Records. A search from this page will search all indexed collections.

Deceased Ancestor's Name

Enter the name into the data entry boxes. Use the Tips and Tricks for Name searches.

Search with a life event

Enter events facts into the data entry boxes. Use the Tips and Tricks for Place searches.

Limit the number of hits in your search by entering some of the following:

TIPS:

- A broad search may bring up too many matches making it difficult to identify your ancestor correctly. Using the event boxes is an effective tool for narrowing down, or filtering, the search.
- Filtering with too much information may cause a search which eliminates the record you want. Enter the information that pertains to the record you are seeking, ex. a death date will not help in a census search, but "lived in" or "residence" would be very important.

Search with a relationship

Enter relationship facts that are pertinent to the type of event you are searching for, ex. enter the spouse name when searching for a marriage record. Use the Tips and Tricks for Name searches.

Restrict records by

In this section filter By Location, Type, Batch Number or Film Number.

Research Strategy for indexed records

1. Start with the surname.
2. Add details such as given name, birth date. Keep the details to search-specific items (i.e. no death date if searching for birth date)
3. If desired results are not found, refine your search. Change the search parameters and search again. Click "Update" button each time.
4. Use filters to narrow the search. You can add and remove as many filters as needed.
5. Try narrowing the search to a specific collection. Collections are listed under "Restrict records by:" Repeat the process using variations of details and filters.
6. Add relationships and add life events. Continue to repeat process clicking the "Update" button each time.

TIPS:

- keep track of the search criteria you have used, both successful and unsuccessful. This may help you with future searches.

2. Research By Location

To begin a search by locality, use the Search page map of the world. Click on a continent and a selection box will appear. From the selection box choose a smaller jurisdiction, such as a country, state, parish, or province.

TIPS:

- Once you have chosen a smaller locality (state for example) search all indexed collections for this locality using the data entry boxes.
- Use the instructions under Search Historical Records in the preceding section for tips on adding Deceased Ancestor's Name, Life Event and Relationship.

Filter by collection

Underneath the search fields is a place where to Filter by collection. The top five collections are listed with a box to check on the left. There is also a place to choose "Show all [87] Collections" (or whatever the current number is).

3. Find a Collection

To begin a search by collection title enter the title in the "Collection Title" data entry box.

TRICKS:

- As you begin to type in the collection title the list of titles will appear below. Choose from the selections.

When choosing to search from "Research By Location" and selecting the place from the world map you are searching indexed records only in that chosen locality.

Identifying indexed record types

<input type="checkbox"/> Arkansas Births and Christenings, 1812-1965	10,634	21 Nov 2013	← Index only, no image
<input type="checkbox"/> Arkansas Church Marriages, 1860-1976	542	06 Dec 2016	← Index and image
<input type="checkbox"/> Arkansas Civil War Service Records of Confederate Soldiers, 1861-1865	532,541	20 Apr 2012	← Index and image on a partner website
<input type="checkbox"/> Arkansas Civil War Service Records of Union Soldiers, 1861-1865	158,093	20 Apr 2012	
<input type="checkbox"/> Arkansas Death Index, 1914-1950	594,114	23 Jan 2012	

TIPS:

- Use a broad search. Don't fill in every box of a search page—using less information often gives better results.
- Use a date range. Don't use exact years in a search, add 2-5 year range.
- Use alternate spellings, abbreviations, and nicknames.
- Use exact searches. Checking the box to the right of the name, date, or place is a exact search. Leaving a box unchecked is a broad search.

Unindexed Records or Browsable Collections

FamilySearch has many digitized historical record collections that have not been indexed. These records can be accessed online, most of them from home. Because they are unindexed the process to search them is often page by page. Don't ignore these collections, despite the time it takes to use them as they can be very useful.






There are two ways to locate the Browse only collections.

1. Historical Records page using "Browse all published collections"
2. **FamilySearch Catalog**

1. Browse all published collections

To browse all published collections, click on the blue link "Browse all published collections." This search brings up an alphabetical list of all record collections, both indexed and unindexed.

Go to www.familysearch.org, choose **Search** and then **Records**. Click on the blue link at the bottom right to "Browse all published collections." The specific collections with the notation "Browse Images" are the unindexed digitized collections.

Alabama State Census, 1855	34,978	12 Dec 2011	
Alabama State Census, 1866	243,781	12 Dec 2011	
 Alabama, Census of Confederate Veterans, 1907, 1921, 1927	20,403	21 Dec 2016	← Indexed collection
 Alabama, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1865-1872	Browse Images	07 Jul 2014	
 Alabama, Jefferson County Circuit Court Papers, 1870-1916	Browse Images	14 Aug 2012	← "Browse Images" indicates unindexed collection
 Alabama, Madison County Chancery and Circuit Court Records, 1829-1968	Browse Images	26 Jun 2014	
 Alabama, Mobile Magnolia Cemetery Interment Cards, 1836-1995	32,735	22 Apr 2015	

TIPS:

- **Choose a specific collection by name. The list is alphabetical.**
- Choose records with "Browse Images" for unindexed record sets.
- **Choosing the country will bring up a list of smaller jurisdictions along with date ranges and collections that are tailored to the country.**

TRICKS:

- **Filter the Historical Record Collections list. Use the Place, Date and Collections on the left to filter.**
- Using the "Filter by collection" name box at the top filters the search. Try entering a **locality (such as Delaware) or subject (such as Land)**. These terms can be combined to **further narrow the collections.**
- Use the "Availability" check box to filter your selections to "only collections with images."

2. FamilySearch Catalog

All collections, including digital collections, available at FamilySearch are listed in the FamilySearch Catalog. Using the Catalog is one of the most effective ways to locate and search digital record sets. This presentation will demonstrate how to find digitized records through the Catalog.

Go to www.familysearch.org, choose Search and then “Catalog” from the drop-down menu. This is the Catalog search page. Here you can search by Place, Surnames, Titles, Author, Subjects, Keywords, Call Number and Film/Fiche number. The most common type of search is the “Place” search. The page defaults to the Place search. Enter in the locality you want to find records for your ancestor in.

Locating Digital Records through the Catalog

- As you type in the locality standardized place names will begin to appear. Choose from this standardized list and then click on “Search.”
- From the search results page choose the record subject (ex. probate, church, etc.).
- Next, choose the specific record collection within the records subject.

Notes

Arkansas Probate Records are available online, [click here](#).

If you see this red link in the “Notes” section the record set is digital. Click on “[here](#)”

Note	Location	Collection/Shelf	Film/DGS	Format
Probate case files: Abney, Elizabeth - Awtrey, Cephas Lee (cont.)	Granite Mountain Record Vault	United States & Canada Film	2404201	
Probate case files: (cont.) Awtrey, Cephas Lee - Bean, Roscoe	Granite Mountain Record Vault	United States & Canada Film	2405935	

If the camera icon is in the format column the collection is digital. Click on the 

TIPS and TRICKS for viewing the Browsible Collections from the Historical Record Collection page or from the FamilySearch Catalog

- After clicking on “Browse Images,” you will see a list of jurisdictions or record sets that are part of the collection.
- Choose the jurisdiction or record set you are interested in seeing. This will display the first image of the record set.
- Closing the Image Index will make the image viewing space larger.

Navigating the images

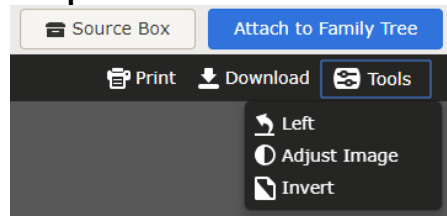
Use the black navigation bar (just above the image) to navigate through the images. Use the arrows and Image numbers to scroll through the current record set.



Use the collection title to choose a different record set.

Arkansas Probate Records, 1817-1979 ▾ | Benton > Chancery Court records 1843-1882 vol A-B >

As you browse through the images, use the Tools to enhance them. You can download and print too.



Zoom in and out

Grid of images

Full screen

To return to the main FamilySearch page and choose a different collection, click the FamilySearch icon at the top of the page.

Best TIPS from FamilySearch US&Can Research Team

- Identify one individual you want to find information about so you don't get **sidetracked**.
- **Create a research log as you go. Paper or digital.**
- **Keep a research log so you know what collections were searched and the day they were searched. This will help to identify whether a collection has been updated.**
- **Never believe you will remember where you have searched for your ancestor. Write it down!**
- **When scanning an image into your USB drive title it with the complete citation.**
- **Include NIL searches, where you did not find any information about your ancestor.**
- **Bookmark websites you want to use again to find other ancestors.**
- **Copy the URL of the images you find and add them as sources to your tree and on your research log.**
- **Study the first few pages of a collection to determine how the collection is organized and whether the record set has its own internal index.**
- **Once you find an ancestor, scroll through the pages before and after to see if the record has multiple pages. Don't miss out on page 2.**
- **Even if the record set has a name searchable index still look at the images to verify that the person you are seeking is not in the index.**
- **When you find the image make a copy so you don't have to spend time looking for it again.**
- **Ignore the initial search box and search by collection.**
- **Check the state collections for the state you are searching in.**

- **Always write the collection name and other identifying information on your document.**
- **Always view the image, not just the index.**
- **Read the record multiple times.**
- **Keep good notes. Always.**
- **Check back often to see what new collections are available to search or browse.**
- **Learn about the source.**
- **Become familiar with the history of the county you will research.**
- **Join a Genealogical Society** in your ancestor's area.
- **City directories can be very helpful. Don't forget them.**
- **Believe that your ancestor is not the only one in the area with the name.**