

The Ancestor Deep-Dive: How to Find Out Everything There Possibly is to Know About Your Ancestor

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Too often our research is driven by sources. We look for an ancestor in all the sources we've heard about, and we only break new ground when we hear about new ones. How do we assess how comprehensive our search has been? How do we know if we're even on the right path to get the answers we long for? This presentation will teach a methodology for creating a research plan centered on the discoveries we want to make, not just the sources we think we are limited to.

Sources vs. Discoveries

- **Repositories** are places, both online and off, where we can find genealogical **sources** with information about our ancestors.
- **Discoveries** are the answers we actually want to find.
- Too often we work **backwards**, looking for untapped sources to give us new answers about questions we aren't asking, rather than going **forwards** from a clear research plan towards the discoveries we actually want to make.

What is the Ancestor Deep-Dive?

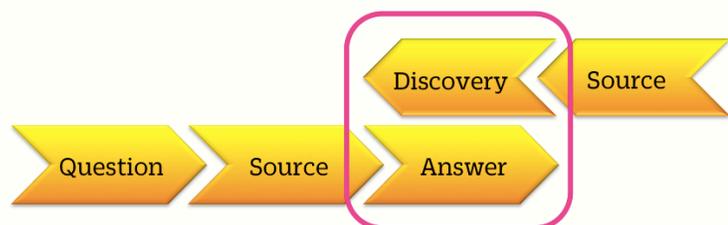
- One ancestor
- No question is too vague
- No search is too arduous
- Work forwards *and* backwards

Working Forwards: Generating Questions

- Turning the things you want to know into researchable questions
 - **Events:** Make a timeline of all dated events, considering using cause-and-effect to brainstorm what might be missing
 - **Character traits:** Brainstorm personal facts and organize by category
 - **Context:** Identify the places, dates, and situations of your ancestor's life
- Question → Source → Answer

Working Backwards: Generating Questions

- Checking all the sources out there as thoroughly as possible to uncover answers to the questions you don't know to ask
- Discovery ← Source
 - **Obvious** information: The



- main facts on the record.
- **Implied** information: Deductions based on all the information on the record, expected and unexpected.
- **Comparative** information: Inferences from comparing your ancestor's record to other records in the same set.
- **"Does he appear in...?"**: Looking for your ancestor in unlikely sources.

Finding and Working *All* the Sources

- Organizing your record search by place, time, and affiliations
- Categories of records:
 - **Basic records**, like censuses, birth records, marriage records, and death records
 - **Extended records**, like city directories, immigration records, military records, and gravestones
 - **Historical context**, like period newspapers, maps, books, and archival collections (government, historical societies, museums, university archives, corporate archives, and special collections)
 - **Government records**, like court records, deeds, charters, and government publications
 - **Broad reading**, like journal articles and non-fiction books
 - **Personal color**, from friends and family and their papers, photographs, heirlooms, and stories
- Using these records the "Deep-Dive" way:
 - Search for your ancestor's friends and family, too
 - Consider the facts of each record in context
 - Don't rely on the OCR of typewritten records
 - Fit the history you learn into the timeline of your ancestor's life to fill in the missing context and cause-and-effect
- Tips for finding sources:
 - Online newspapers
 - Newspapers.com
 - GenealogyBank.com
 - Fold3.com
 - news.google.com/newspapers
 - Proquest.com
 - FultonHistory.com
 - Offline newspapers (U.S.): ChroniclingAmerica.gov
 - Make friends with like-minded researchers:
 - Facebook groups
 - Local historical societies
 - Local genealogical groups
 - AncestorCloud.com
 - Genlighten.com
 - Talk to acknowledged experts in your area.
 - Don't be afraid of archival collections!

- Footnote surf when you're reading to discover new sources.
- Use "cousin bait" to help other people find you
 - DNA matching websites like FamilyTreeDNA.com and Ancestry
 - Tree matching on Ancestry and MyHeritage
 - Post pictures on Flickr or Picasa
 - Post stories on your own blog or on Treelines.com
 - Get your search in the news
 - Make sure everywhere you post cousin bait, there's a clear way for people to contact you
- Visit the places your ancestors lived and the sites that were important to them

Putting It All Together

- Kinds of Answers
 - Records-based
 - Stories
 - Contextual inferences
 - Most often a combination of all three
- Working forwards: Finding the right sources to answer your questions
- Working backwards: Brainstorming creative sources and using them in creative ways