

Before 1850: Strategies for Early American Research

Beginning genealogists with access to census and vital records may not encounter an actual research challenge until the 1840s.

Successful research prior to the 1850 census (the first census to list the names and ages of everyone in a household) requires that the genealogist adopt a strategic approach – learning how to conduct historical research – and not simple searching.

Research prior to the 1850s is more complicated for a number of reasons. The most obvious being that the 1790 -1850 censuses only record Heads-of-household by name. However, this is not the only reason.

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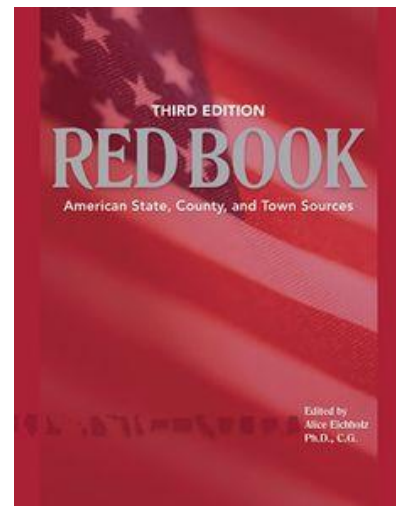
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Practices

The thorough record-keeping practices of today's government in no way resemble the practices of generations ago. For administrative records in the US (Court, Land, Civil) consult the REDBOOK (see sources) which provides comprehensive information on every county and state government.

Map Address	County	Date Formed Parent County/ies	Birth Marriage Death	Land Probate Court
H2 101 N. 7th Vincennes 47591	Knox	1790 (Indiana county 1800) unorganized	1882 1806 1882	1783 1790 1801
<i>Knox County, NW Territory, was formed from non-county area in 1790. This included segments of present Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, plus all of Indiana. Knox County became an Indiana territory in 1800, although much of the original county had been formed into other counties by that time. It became an Indiana county in 1816. Record loss 1814.</i>				
B5 121 N. Lake St. Warsaw 46580	Kosciusko	1835 (1836) unorganized (Cass/Elkhart/ Grant)	1882 1830 1882	1834 1836 1836

REDBOOK: American State, County, and Town Sources (See Recommended Sources)



The REDBOOK provides comprehensive dates for vital records, land, probate, and court records for all U.S. Counties. In addition, it provides information on courthouse fires and records losses, history of record keeping practices, outlines of the local legal system and the records of probate and court, land records, maps, church records, and other regional source material.

Coverture and Women's Rights

Prior to 1850, most states (or colonies) practiced Coverture. Under Coverture, married women, or Feme Covert, were according to common law "covered" by their husbands. They lacked the right to own property, to draft or probate a will, or to be proprietor of a business. The first state to enact property rights was Mississippi in 1839.

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Conduct Reasonably Exhaustive Research

A process – which should not be limited to a single search query – but common practice throughout your genealogical research. Consult Standards 17 & 19:

- Seek evidence
- process findings
- interpret each source or document
- Correlate all the details
- Evaluate all of the evidence as it is presented
- Develop new queries based on findings

“Thorough research gathers **sufficient data to test** – and to support or reject – hypotheses concerning identities, relationships, events, and situations.”

- Genealogy Standards, Standard 17

“Genealogists attempt to collect all information **potentially relevant** to the questions they investigate.”

- Genealogy Standards, Standard 19

Embrace Evidence-Based Research

Databases like Ancestry and Familysearch provide global search functions – which can make early work very easy to perform. When the researcher hits 1850 – it becomes all stop.

Mills suggests that “insight is generated by reconstructing an entire life [...] studying a person in the context of family, neighborhood, and social environment [...] linking people through chains of **evidence** that demonstrate ongoing interactions, proximities, and common patterns [...]” (Mills, Elizabeth Shown. “What’s The Evidence?” *National Genealogical Society 2017 Family History Conference Syllabus*. Arlington, VA., 2017, pp. 347-350.)

There are three distinct types of evidence:

- **Direct Evidence** - Directly answers a research question.
- **Indirect Evidence** -Information which when combined with other information can be arranged into an argument for proof.
- **Negative Evidence** - An inference, which can be drawn from the absences of a situation that should exist under particular circumstances.

Evidence is not absolute. It is simply a method of proof – which is open to interpretation when supplied with more evidence.

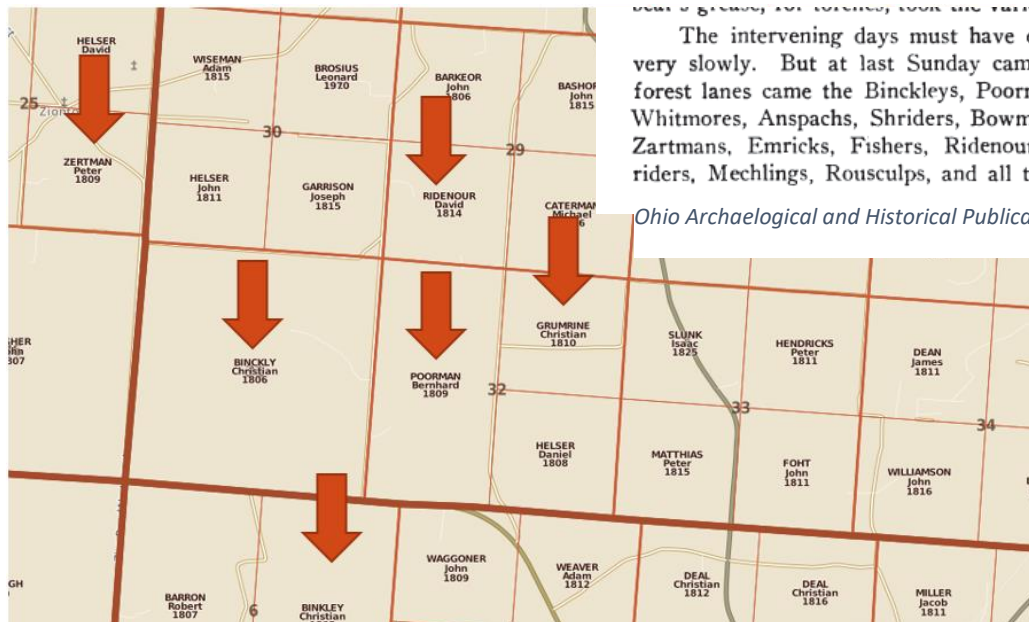
Cluster Research

Mills’ quote references Family, Neighborhood, and Social Environment – a grouping she often refers to as the FAN Club (family, associates, neighbors). This FAN Club or “Cluster” is key to unlocking challenging genealogical queries. When working on an individual, you should always be mindful of their cluster and ask questions which lead in that direction: Who settled around them? Did anyone settle at the same time? Who did they go to church with? Who is their minister? Who were the prominent families in the area? Who owned the local general store?

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Blacksmith? Did they serve in the military with anyone? Does anyone appear as a witness on their records?

Common sources of cluster information include but are not limited to: Census, Tax, Voter's Registrations, First Landowner Maps (see below), Plat Maps, Church Records, Court records, Roster Lists, etc. Look at dates of settlement, church membership, and other consistent variables. The example below shows a number of names from a Regional Periodical which correlate with a singular individual: Christian Grumrine. These individuals were not only early settlers, but all attended the same congregation – St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Somerset, Ohio.



...of the grass, for horses, took the various parts homeward.

The intervening days must have dragged themselves along very slowly. But at last Sunday came, and with it along the forest lanes came the Binkleys, Poormans, Pughs, Parkinsons, Whitmores, Anspachs, Shriders, Bowmans, Humbergers, Neals, Zartmans, Emricks, Fishers, Ridenours, Swinehearts, Cooper-riders, Mechlings, Rousculps, and all the rest of them.

Ohio Archaeological and Historical Publications, Vol. XXVII, pp. 375

Christian Grumrine, First Landowners Map, Historygeo, Perry Co., Ohio

When in Doubt, Follow the Minister

Prior-20th Century – people did not just move about freely. They traveled in groups. The central figurehead of many of these groups was the Minister (Clergy) - and thankfully for us, these individuals were regularly written about – indeed, the most likely individual in any community to have a biography is a Minister. Local Histories often talk about the Ministers serving a particular church or group of churches. Encyclopedias exist for the various denominational clergy. Many ministers kept detailed journals – often-documenting baptisms, marriages, and burials that they conducted during as their duties. If you cannot work out where your ancestor came from, research the minister. Perhaps they came from the same location.

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Connecting with Local History

When conducting genealogy, it is very easy to get hyper-focused on the family and forget the world in which they live. County histories, church histories, regional periodicals (at right), and local newspapers are all insightful sources that can help to unlock the secrets of your ancestor's lives. Lists of early settlers or church founders can be used for cluster research. PERSI (Periodical Source Index) is a free database produced by the Allen County Library and is available on Find My Past – it's a great way to locate regional history. And don't overlook the local newspaper. You may find articles 20-30-50 years later that resolve your query!

LUTHERANISM IN PERRY COUNTY, OHIO.

BY PROFESSOR C. L. MARTZOLFF,
Ohio University, Athens, Ohio

It was only a narrow trail. It followed the moccasined footprints of the Shawnee brave, as he had journeyed back and forth on his mission of war or the chase, from the Pennsylvania frontier to his home on the plains of the Scioto. It cut its blazed way through the virgin forest of Ohio from the Fort of the Quaker, Zane, at Wheeling to where it again crossed the river at Limestone, into Kentucky. This first public highway in Ohio had been projected by Ebenezer Zane, the commandant at Fort Henry, under the authority of the United States government in 1796.

Now that the Indian wars, which for several years had disturbed the first Ohioans, were happily over, due to the signal victory of Wayne on the Maumee in 1794, this pioneer thoroughfare, known in history as Zane's Trace, was soon destined to become the artery through which would pour the stream of emigration, as it spilled itself over the Alleghenies, to fructify the virgin Ohio land which lay ready for the axe, the plow, and the sickle. Along with this procession of home-seeking humanity as it pushed its way along the blazed path, there came to Perry County, Ohio, its first settler and its first Lutheran in the person of Christian Binkley.

It was in April, 1801, that this hardy pioneer came into what is now Reading township, Perry County, though at that time it was part of Richland township, Fairfield County. He was one of the many Marylanders to make his home in this section, having moved from Frankstown, near that center of Lutheranism, Hagerstown, Washington County, Maryland.

Born in 1737, he was a middle-aged man at the time of

(375)

Lutheranism in Perry Co. Ohio, Ohio Historical and Genealogical Publications, Vol. XXVIII

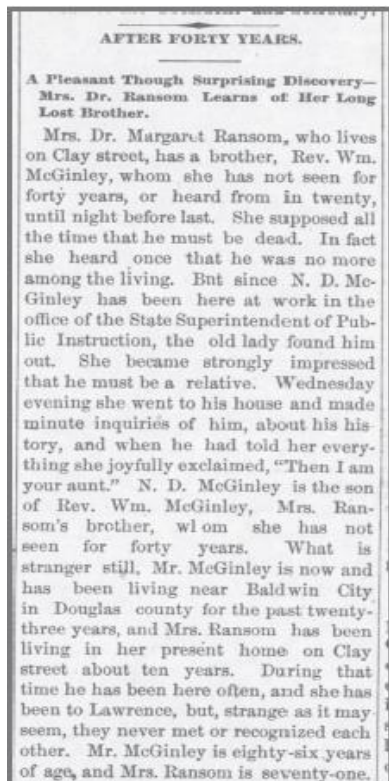
Collateral Research

Do not make the mistake of only research direct lines. Much of genealogy is getting the background on brothers, sisters, cousins, in-laws. You never know when an article or will or death certificate – what have you – will be the key to your own direct ancestors question.

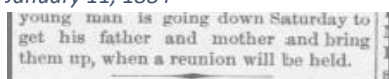
In the course example – a collateral son of a direct ancestor – revealed a newspaper article about how his long-lost aunt was living in the exact same town as he was. Researching this Aunt, two-additional brothers were located – and through them, the parents of the direct ancestor. Pursue all leads!

Identifying Migration Patterns

Local Histories can be a wealth of knowledge for unlocking migration patterns. Combine them with the many resource available such as Dollarhide's Map Guide to American Migration Routes. Many early maps have been digitized and are available through the library of congress – such as the Abraham Bradley map (which details post-roads in 1804.



Daily Commonwealth, Topeka, Kansas, January 11, 1884



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Where there is a Will, There is a Way

A terrible pun, for sure. Wills are a great resource. But don't limit yourself there. Dig deep – seek out Probate, Land, Tax, and other records.

Probate

Of all the records available to us prior to 1850, perhaps the most useful records to locate are those of probate. Probates include Wills, Inventories, Administrations, Estate Sales, Guardianships and many other documents. Every document in the probate can prove valuable in your genealogical quest. Probates were not always handled by a “probate court”. Research the practices for EVERY locality you are looking in.

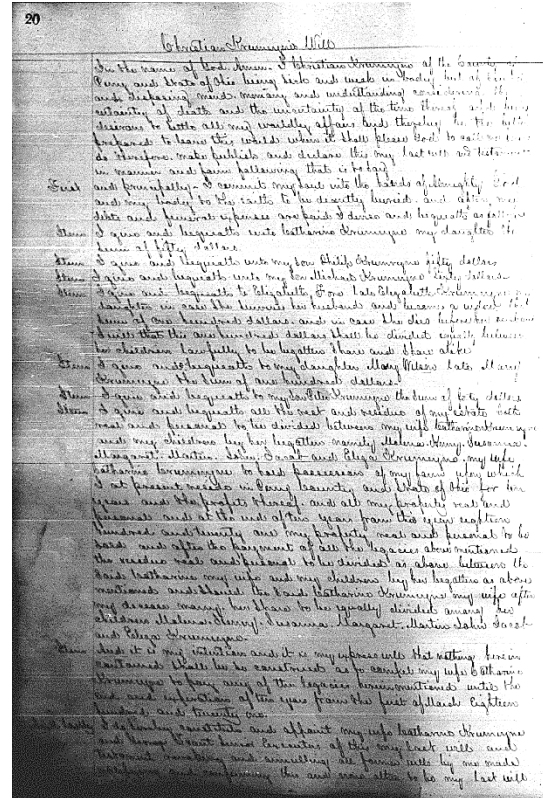
There will not always be a Will. YES - Wills are the ideal find because they often name all the living family – but they do not always. Sometimes they use vague terms like “my beloved wife” or “my minor children”. In cases where there is no will and the individual died – Intestate – that doesn't mean you should stop. Probate records for intestate cases often include guardianships for minors, distributions to heirs, estate sales, and other records which name cluster and collateral relationships.

Don't limit your search to Probate Courts - Probates might be recorded in Courts of Chancery, Court of Common Pleas, Orphan's Court, Civil Court, County Court, City Court – or other court variations. Sometimes the Probate is handled by one court – but the Guardianship – or transfers of land – by another. Consult the REDBOOK!

Deeds

Deed records document the transfer of land from one individual to another. During Coverture, married women could not own property – and they were not their husband's legal heir. Instead, they received a dower – a 1/3rd right to interest in their husband's estate. The great thing about this is – if her husband sold property – she would have to provide a dower release. There are many instances where the dower release or deed acknowledgment are the only place a married woman's name might appear.

The value of deeds are not limited to married women. Deeds can tell a story – examples from the program included the provision of an Alienation Fine – or the exchange of land from an Aunt to her nephews – on their reaching legal age to receive their inheritance.



Will, Christian Krumryne, Perry Co., Ohio, 1821

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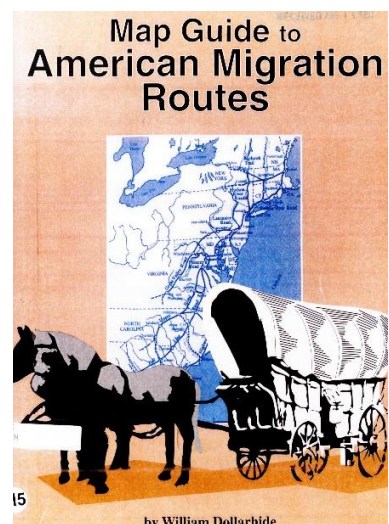
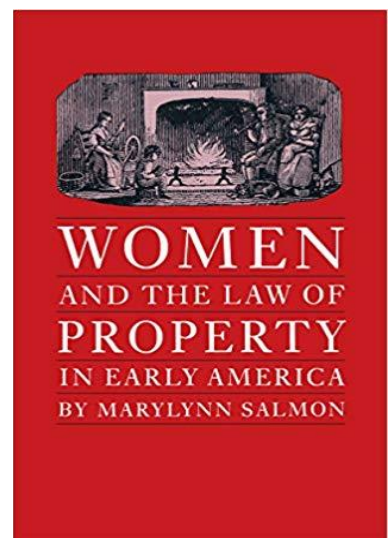
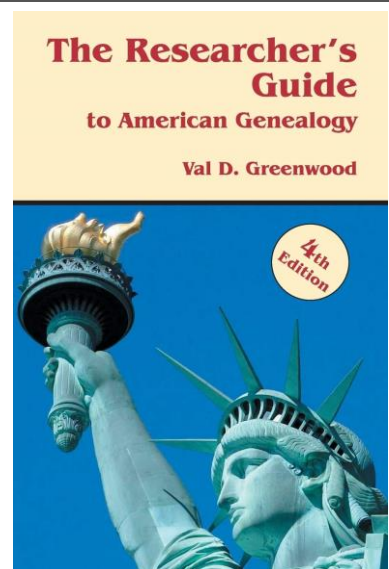
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