

Stuck? Ask More Questions

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I. Choose One Ancestor and Start with Your Ultimate Question—What You Want to Learn but Can't Find.

- A. Beginners' general questions:
 - 1. Where should I start?
 - 2. What records do you have?
 - 3. Can you suggest other records?
- B. Everyone—a few examples of ultimate questions:
 - 1. Who were the ancestors' parents? Who was his/her mother or father?
 - 2. What city, county, state, country is an immigrant ancestor from?
 - 3. Where in the U.S. was family before ending up in the current place?
 - 4. How did a couple living miles apart meet and marry?
 - 5. How do I separate people with the same name?
 - 6. Have I adequately documented a connection between my ancestor and his/her family or place?

II. Asking a Question of an Archive/Library Employee or a Helpful Genealogist

- A. Ask ONE question.
- B. Give whatever you have, even if it's incomplete. But,
- C. Include ONLY:
 - 1. Why you're seeking this ancestor—e.g.: your ultimate Question.
 - 2. Ancestor's name.
 - 3. Type event sought—baptism, marriage, cemetery, probate, military, etc.
 - 4. Date of the event or dates of that ancestor's BMD.
 - 5. Place: church or institution, PLUS city, county, state, country.
 - 6. If Q involves others, add: names, dates of spouse, children, or siblings.
- D. Let the responder request additional information they need to help you.

III. Be Thorough

- A. Use widely agreed upon research techniques, such as BCG's <https://www.bcgcertification.org/> Genealogical Proof Standard:
 - 1. Reasonably exhaustive research; at least two identical records for EACH piece of evidence.
 - 2. Pieces of evidence, each one a separate piece:
 - a. name1, name2, surname.
 - b. day, month, year.
 - c. city, county, state!
 - 3. Complete and accurate source citations—Evaluate sources!
 - 4. Thorough analysis and correlation—For each piece of evidence, obtain at least two records with identical pieces of evidence.

5. Resolution of conflicting evidence—Evaluate each piece of evidence too! Think around a problem for non-typical solutions and added evidence—who or what record might provide more?
6. Soundly written conclusions based on the strongest evidence—written down now; you can always revise your thinking later.

BREAK: WHAT ARE YOUR QUESTIONS--DISCUSSION

IV. Create a Timeline of What's Known About the Ancestor. Include Sources!

- A. Start with death and work back to birth.
- B. Include all record types available for each event. For example, both civil and religious or every step in the death process.
- C. Choose a Focus period, such as:
 1. The earliest records.
 2. Records covering the period of your question.
- D. Broaden the timeline: add every family member's events, especially if:
 1. Records are sparse.
 2. Focus is on differentiating people.
 3. Need to find a missing family member.
- E. Sample Timeline—John Schulz—including sources!

| | |
|------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. 1907 died St. Louis Co. | [church, obit, cem] |
| 2. 1906 50 th wedding anniversary | [news] |
| 3. 1900, 1880, 1870, 1860 Carondelet Twp | [census] |
| 4. 1869 purchased StL Co farm from in-laws | [StLdeed] |
| 5. 1862 & 1864 Enrolled MO Militia service | [MO Adj Gen] |
| 6. 1860 naturalized | [Law Cmr Ct] |
| 7. 1857-1884, 14 children born StL, MO, 2 died | [census] |
| 8. 1857 W side of Menard between Geyer & Emmet | [city dir] |
| 9. 1856 married Maria Jahn in StL City | [civilm] |
| 10. 1853 immigrant, Baltimore, with brother | [shiplist] |
| 11. c1833 born, Issigau, Bavaria | [family and letters] |

V. Review Every Record Already Possessed.

- A. Pay attention to every word in each record.
- B. Learn to decipher the unreadable, whether English or another language.
- C. Seek: names, places, dates, occupations, religions, social groups, hobbies, and names of all associated people, including witnesses.
- D. Follow these additional clues to more records and people.

VI. Ask New Questions.

- A. Start with what's missing in the Timeline—both sources and people.
 1. Identify missing records by double-checking a list of record types such as: <https://stlgs.org/media/freeforms/source-checklist-2024.pdf>
 2. Try to explain any gaps in the timeline.
- B. Locate missing records by asking more questions based on the new clues.

- C. Prioritize the new questions—some depend on first answering others.
- D. Make a new plan of action.

BREAK: LOOK AT YOUR TIMELINES--DISCUSSION.

VII. Each Ancestor's Additional Questions Differ

- A. Schulz—Family knew where he's from in Germany. But, letters from that place to him in St. Louis only weakly verify family is in that place. Need more!
 - 1. What known clues not yet followed? —Concordia Farmer's Club.
 - 2. What's missing in timeline that might help? —Church marriage.
 - 3. Verified Schulz came from the place in Germany he'd reported.
- B. Meyer—Only name known. Ultimate Q=where in Germany he's from? Need new Questions build more about him before answering ultimate Q.
 - 1. When we found Meyer's name—
 - a. Whom were we researching? —a Straub ancestor.
 - b. Which of their records named him? —an 1855 land sale, which also yielded: wife's second married name=Greb, married names of three daughters including one Straub, and another Straub as buyer.
 - 2. When did G Meyer buy the piece of land sold in 1855?
 - 3. Were Meyers (or Grebs) in the U.S. census 1850 and 1840?
 - 4. When, where, and how many children born to Meyers?
 - 5. Where, when, and which Meyers arrived in U.S. from Germany?
 - 6. Son, Georg2, was not in the 1855 land sale. What happened to him?
 - 7. When was Mrs. Meyer's second marriage to P. Greb?
 - 8. Where she's from may differ from Meyer's origin or be nearby.
 - 9. When did Georg Meyer die in U.S.? News, will/probate, funeral home, +
 - 10. Ultimate Q: where from in Germany, still NOT answered—Ask family!
 - 11. Daughter's marriages—When, where did each marry? Name parents?
 - 12. Found Georg Meyer's place of German/French origin. Confirmed it with more than one independent (not provided by same informant) record.
- C. Both obscure records & other family members helped verify answers!

VIII. Online Sites for Help Answering Questions and Getting Unstuck

- A. Family Search (FSL) (<https://www.familysearch.org/en/united-states/>)
Before searching, consult RESEARCH WIKI for more on place or topic.
- B. Ancestry (<https://www.ancestry.com/>)
 - 1. Find ALL ancestor's censuses from present back.
 - 2. On ancestor's census page examine hints.
 - 3. Follow each hint, returning to same census page so you don't get lost.
- C. Family Search (FSL)--continue for more.
 - 1. Several ways to search site, try all! More is available if use site fully.
 - a. Catalog—search by Country, State, and County.
 - b. Records—search name or scroll down and browse.
 - c. Full-Text Search—index previously unindexed records; expanding!
 - d. Images—newest data available; not yet indexed.

- e. Books—online from FSL and outside sources.
- 2. Everything is NOT indexed, NOR does everything have images.
- 3. Even if you think you know how to use FSL, you'll learn new tips from: Dana Ann Palmer, *Ultimate Guide to Mastering FamilySearch* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co, 2025).
- D. Some additional suggested online sites to consult:
 - 1. Find A Grave (<https://www.findagrave.com/>) + other cemetery sites.
 - 2. Newspapers.com (<https://www.newspapers.com/>) + more news sites.
 - 3. U.S. Bureau of Land Management--Patents and Tract Books (<https://glorerecords.blm.gov/default.aspx>)
 - 4. National Archives: <https://www.archives.gov/>
 - 5. Library of Congress: <https://catalog.loc.gov>
 - 6. World Library Catalog: <http://www.worldcat.org>
 - 7. Lineage Societies: National Society, Daughters of the American Revolution <https://www.dar.org/research>; for others google "hereditary and lineage societies in the U.S."
 - 8. Online books: 1) Google or 2) Hathi Trust <https://www.hathitrust.org/> and others.

IX. Don't Give Up, Use Original Records Wherever They're Located!

- A. County Courthouse
- B. Church, Cemetery, School, Funeral Home, Military, Business, etc.
- C. Local genealogy libraries and specialized local libraries—e.g. Police, etc.
- D. Local Historical Society
- E. Museums
- F. State Historical Society
- G. State Archives

X. Answers Likely Exist; You Must Locate Them!

- A. Concise questions. Let the responder ask for more.
- B. Thorough research.
- C. At least two identical records for each piece of evidence.
- D. Create a timeline.
- E. Review exiting records.
- F. Ask what records and people are missing; obtain them.
- G. Think around the problem. Who or what record may provide more?
- H. Venture beyond those main online sites.
- I. USE ORIGINAL RECORDS WHERE THEY'RE LOCATED!