

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://glorecords.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 existing 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!