

The Amateur Genealogist

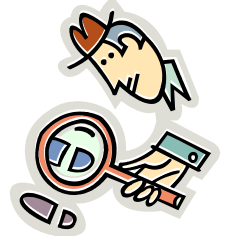
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Be A Detective: Follow Every Clue...

Note: Every document may be filled with mystifying clues, odd details, misinformation, and straight-out lies! Be prepared.

As you research further back into your past ancestors history, you will likely find fewer and fewer accurate details of individual and incomplete details of families. Sometimes, there are likely to be very few documents of their lives simply because they did not own property, pay taxes, own businesses, did not go to jail or to the Poorhouse, and so on.

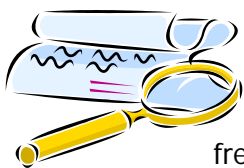
But you can follow small clues. Here's an example: the 1911 Dublin Census lists every household on a separate page signed by the head of the household ... ah-ha! there's the signature of the head of household - your widowed paternal grandmother's signature, and her widowed sister living with her – more information to follow and to research.



On my father's birth registration document here is my grandfather's signature, with some new information: known as Jack, he signed his name here as "Wm.Jno.", making it much easier for me to search for him in other documents. Now I can look him up in ship passenger lists, the 1881 British Census and more documents. Here's more new information: on a ship's list, I find this same grandfather sailing to Canada in 1911 with his father-in-law, a few years after his younger brother emigrated, also to Canada. More questions to ask, more information to search, more clues to follow. His brother apparently stayed in Ontario – I need to look there for more details on this less-known family and cousins.



Whenever possible, get a copy of or an image of the Original Document. The original document frequently has details that were not transcribed, e.g., the address, township, document date, employment details, other people living in the household, plus neighbouring households. An interesting example: here's a Joseph Armstrong listed as a nephew in the Gillespie household: this could be possibly my greatgrandmother's brother's son – now I can look for more details in time and place.



One census states that a family line of greatgreatgrandparents arrived in the USA in 1817 - but another document says 1822. Who's right? People frequently misremember dates unless they have the relevant document in their hand at the time. Also remember that in the past, people rarely had to fill in documents with all the details that we do so frequently in our lives, therefore dates were easily misremembered.

Note that any document that has two or more people involved in it can contain questionable data. For example, a relative of your ancestor tells information about that ancestor to a clerk or another person who may have mis-heard a date when writing it down, then years later the ink-blotted handwriting is transcribed by a third person, who makes another error or typo. One error after another. This kind of error is more common than one would think. Expect it.



Be open-minded and patient as you research your family trees, and you may find several tantalizing clues to help you find more information on your ancestors. Soon you will be doing the little frenzied "happy dance" of many amateur genealogists when they finally find "the" information needed to fill in a blank on their tree! Enjoy your searches.

Questions? Celia@RootsBasic.com