

# *OVERCOMING DEAD ENDS*

By Carolyn H. Brown

In every family genealogy there will be “dead ends” also called “brick walls.” Some come faster than others, however most, as far back as 1700, may be overcome.

Lack of organization may be the problem as well as failure to follow good genealogy research techniques. Failure to analyze the data you have, as well as, study how others have overcome their problems are other causes. Some dead ends may never be overcome due to lack of records.

## **GET ORGANIZED**

Organization is the key to knocking down brick walls. No matter which method you use to get organized, you need to be able to find the documents and information you have already gathered. Many times you will find you already have some of the information you are seeking. You may also find you didn't analyze the documents well enough to know where to look next.

## **WHY WE HAVE PROBLEMS**

Many new researchers think they can just jump in and start researching. For the beginning that may be true, because you have to start at home and make sure you have contacted all of your known cousins to see if they have information, documents and photos your side of the family doesn't have. Once you have the information from your family, start reading genealogy how-to books. Notice I said books, since they vary a little. You need all of the help you can gather.

Don't try to move too fast. Don't assume you can go straight back on an ancestral line without paying attention to the family around them.

Purchase a good genealogy program. Record the facts about each individual, and the source for each fact. Use the many lists and reports the program provides for a good overview of the problem. Create a “to-do” list as well as a “done” list.

## **KNOW THE TYPES OF RECORDS YOUR ANCESTOR MAY HAVE CREATED**

Your ancestors created many of the same records you may create today. There are two lists available to help you identify what records to look for. One list shows the by record types a person may have created. The other list identifies the type of data the record may hold. Use forms *Records An Individual Might Have Generated* \* and *A Sample of American Records in the Mid 1800's*.\*

## **DEAD END HELP FORMS**

There are many forms available to help researchers record and analyze information.

### *PERIOD APPROXIMATION CHART* \*

Before you embark on more in-depth research, you will need the approximate (or actual) birth, marriage and death dates for your ancestor in question. This chart is based on one method for identifying those missing dates.

### *FAMILY GROUP SHEET* \*

You should identify each member of each family group, as well as, how they are related and their vital information. Identify when and where each event in their life occurred. If you don't know where they were and when they were there, you will be searching in the wrong place. You will also need to know how the area/county was identified at that specific time. State and county lines changed over time. A person may have been born in Virginia, died in West Virginia, and never moved.

### *ANCESTRY CHART* \*

Identify each ancestral line as far back as you can, so you can easily see the family to which each person belongs.

### *TIME LINES* \*

A time line helps you identify what happened in a person's life, and when the event occurred. Use

your computer program to view the time line of the person of interest. Use it as you are looking for documents. It is easy to find a document outside the dates of the person of interest, and apply it to the wrong person.

#### *To-Do Lists*

Make a separate list for each individual of interest. You will find information for multiple people in your family in one document, so don't forget to record the information for each individual listed. Following are four types of to-do lists: *Research Planner\**, *Census Family Research Form\**, *Records For Surname\**, and *Records I Already Have.\**

### **FOLLOW THE MOVEMENT OF THE FAMILY**

There are a wealth of documents you can use to follow how the family may have moved.

*CENSUS RECORDS* may identify the birth place of each individual. In some cases, they may also indicate where the individual's parents were born.

*BIRTH, MARRIAGE, DEATH AND OBITUARIES* identify when and where the event took place. Some of these records may identify the place others listed were from.

*WILLS, PROBATES, DEEDS, AND OTHER COURT RECORDS* record when and where the event took place, and those to whom the document applies. In some cases, information on other family members may be found in these records. A single document may cover three or four generations.

*CITY DIRECTORIES* identify individuals over 18 who are living at the same address. If the individual was divorced, or their spouse was deceased, it may be noted.

*TAXES AND VOTER REGISTRATIONS* may list several members in the family living in the same household or near by. In these records it is important to follow the address.

*SHIPS PASSENGER LISTS* generally show family members traveling together, where they boarded the ship, and where they were going once they arrived in the new country. The date and place of arrival is very important information.

*UNITED STATE OF AMERICA MAP*. It helps to plot the family movement across the country as the American west opened up. Record when they moved to each new area. Using the *USA Map with Dates\** form showing the date each state joined the Union is the best way to track family movement. The first census taken after that date will be the earliest census for that state. The state may have been part of a territory before becoming a state.

### **SLOW DOWN AND SMELL THE ROSES**

Don't go too fast. Stop, think, analyze and re-group your thoughts and documents. Work on one line at a time. You will find information for other surnames in your search. Those documents should be saved to the other individuals. If you are working on the "A" line, and you find information on a "B" line, save the documents, make a note for each individual, and come back to it later. Stay focused, or you won't get anything done. If you can't go straight back, work the individuals siblings.

### **DON'T BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU READ**

There is a lot of missing information on the Internet, and in legally recorded documents. Documents and lists are only as good as the information supplied, and how it was recorded. Pay close attention to the way statements are made and the words used.

Check the original source. Don't depend on lists. Use multiple websites. The information for the same document may be different in the indexes of another website. Compare names, dates, and places carefully. An index is only as good as the writing on the original document, how the indexer interpreted the handwriting, and how it was input into the computer. All too often mistakes happen.

### **USE YOUR IMAGINATION**

No names has just one spelling. Before 1900 many documents will have the name spelled wrong, because most people were illiterate. I have found the same name spelled three different ways in one

document. Many people didn't know how to spell their own name. Many spoke with an accent which the person recording the information mistook for another name or place. Recent immigrants had strong accents and strange names. Look at the original document and learn the handwriting of the person recording the information. Sometimes the only way you can tell if the information applies to the same family is the physical address, or the mention of other individuals in the document. I have 57 ways to spell Boatfield. All found in the local church records in England over 250 years.

### **DON'T IGNORE EXTENDED FAMILY**

No family lived in a vacuum. They may have lived a mile or so down the road, but they interacted with their neighbors and other family members. If you can't find the name of the parents in the records of your ancestor, look at the records for all of their siblings, children, spouse(s), and close neighbors. Your ancestor may have been involved with a land purchase or court case concerning someone not a family member. As *Elizabeth Shown Mills* has taught us, use the Friends, Associated and Neighbors (FAN) concept.

### **USE ALL RESOURCES AND RECORDS**

The reason you may have dead ends you can't get past is you haven't used **ALL** records which may be available. Usually it's because those records aren't online and not easily accessed, or the records are housed in facilities a long way from where you live. Because of this it is up to you to figure a way to gain access to the original records, or microfilm of those documents, when available. The problem also occurs when the original documents have been destroyed, and no copies remain. In some cases the records do exist, but their location is unknown. This often happened during the American Revolutionary War and Civil War, when citizens removed documents from the courthouse for safe keeping and never returned them. Records have shown up many years later in someone's home. Some have been donated back to the county.

The following is a list of records to look for which may help you get past the dead end:

- Birth, marriage (certificate, banns, and bond), divorce and death records
- Cemetery, obituary and funeral home records
- Census, tax and voter registration records and lists
- Church records, newspapers, business and organizational newsletters and magazines
- Criminal, civil, adoption, guardianship, and other court records
- Land and deed records
- Will, probate and court orders

### **KNOW YOUR HISTORY**

By studying history and maps—local, state, national, and international—you may discover a different approach to your research. What was happening at the time, and how might it have affected your ancestors? Was there a war or an epidemic being raged in the home country of your ancestors causing them to relocate?

What were the modes of transportation at the time you are researching? Who may have traveled with them in their flight? Look for everyone you suspect made the move. Often one member of the group may be located when others may not for various reasons.

### **KNOW THE CUSTOMS OF THE AREA**

Each area has customs unique to that specific place. This depends on where the people came from who settled there. When people left the old country and settled in America, they didn't leave their customs behind. They attended the same church if it was close by. They associated with people who understood their language. Most tried to assimilate into the community around them, however they may have held on to many of the old ways.

### **NAMING CUSTOMS**

People immigrating from a country which have specific name customs are sometimes easier to track

than those families who don't. In other cases, where the naming customs are followed by multiple family members, it may be much harder to distinguish one family group from another. This frequently happens when cousins marry, or when the names carried down in the father's family are the same names carried down in the mother's family. The custom of using the mother's or grandmother's maiden surnames as the first or middle name of children might be a great way to get past the dead end.

#### **SOURCES OF DOCUMENTS ARE IMPORTANT**

We have all been taught to cite your sources. The more specific and accurate the citation the easier it is for you and others using your information to locate where the information was originally located. When you encounter conflicting information you need to be able to locate the original and other sources for the information recorded. In the process of recording the source, if you discover one of the sources is wrong, record the information with both sources and explain your analysis in the source notes areas.

#### **RECORDING PHOTOS**

Photographs are a source, and may open up a whole new idea for research. When, where, who, why and how was the photo created? They may also lead you to sources you never thought about for that person. Look at uniforms for possible occupation. Police and military service uniforms may look similar.

If the photo is about an event, learn as much as you can about it. I had a case where the family passed down a photo of their grandmother cutting a DAR ribbon. That single photo carried the female family line back four well documented generations. The *Case Photo\** and *Print Photo\** forms may be used to document important photographs.

#### **JOIN MULTIPLE GENEALOGICAL SOCIETIES**

You should join the society in the place you live, place you are researching, state being researched, and possibly the extended area of your research.

#### **READ READ READ**

The hobby of genealogy research is expanding daily. More websites are coming online and more records are being added to existing websites. There are magazines and quarterlies available to help you. These publications may identify record types and places to research you never considered before.

#### **USE YOUR GENIE BUDDY**

Every genealogist needs a genie-buddy to bounce ideas off of, and to discuss what has been found. Two heads are better than one when trying to break down a brick wall.

#### **LEARN MORE**

A good source for learning about more extensive research is *The Source: A Guidebook of American Genealogy*. Edited by Loretto Dennis Szucs and Sandra Hargreaves Luebking.

\* **Note:** Copies of all forms shown in the presentation and listed in this report, which are followed by an (\*) asterisk, may be found at [www.bousegeniesaz.org/Resources.html](http://www.bousegeniesaz.org/Resources.html).

You may contact me at:  
GenieCarol@gmail.com