
Research Plans and Techniques That Break Brick Walls

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Objective: This class discusses research strategies, research planning and other techniques for solving tough research problems.

Research Strategies

- Carefully analyze the problem.

Problem Analysis	
Problem: Find the parents of James Stewart.	
What is Known About the Problem	What Does It Suggest
<p>James Stewart was born 27 Feb 1772 Casey, Green Briar, West Virginia. Listed on FGS but not sourced as to where this came from. Another possible birth place of Rockbridge Co., Virginia is listed in History of Nathaniel (Nathan) Stewart 1807-1869 by Sherryl Stewart Allan supplied by client.</p> <p>Alternate spellings of surname: Stuart & Stewart</p>	<p>Probably meant Casey County Kentucky or Greenbrier County, West Virginia. Keep in mind that West Virginia did not become a state until the Civil War.</p> <p>Conflicting birth places. Neither place had birth records at time of James birth. The Rockbridge County possibility looks weaker because there is no direct evidence James even lived there. The marriage record places James as having lived in Greenbrier County. But, if something is found that links James Stewart between Greenbrier County and Rockbridge County that would give Rockbridge more merit. James was an adult before census records were taken. So, he won't be listed with his parents. We might find him living near his parents so a search of the early census records should be done looking for someone old enough to be James parent living in the same places that he was known to live.</p>

- Develop a plan using research calendars to keep your research focused on the problem.

Research Calendar for: [Name of family or person being researched.]			
Repository/Date of Search	Record Title/Goal of Search	Results	Document #

- As the research progresses adjust the plan as needed.
- Write proof summaries and reports.

Start with Internet Collections

- Become familiar with the Website's strengths and weaknesses. [i.e. FindMyPast U.S. census search allows you to select a set of counties for a specified state or states.]
- Consider name spelling changes and transcription errors. See FamilySearch wiki article, ["Spelling Substitution Tables for the United States and Canada."](#)
- Search specific collections.
- Review collection details to determine if the information you seek is part of the collection of interest.

Original vs Derivative Sources

- Review the original image or document whenever possible. Important facts may have been overlooked or mistakes may have been made in transcription.
- Data given in authored sources that does not cite its source should be used as a roadmap for research and not treated as fact.

Historical Background

- Wars affect the availability of records and where they are housed.
- Historical events may have led to the creation of new records and discontinued others.
- Know the law that governed record keeping.

Jurisdictions

- Learn about boundary changes.
- Know who owned or had responsibility for keeping the record.

Maps and Gazetteers

- Were there mountains or rivers in the way?
- Did your family live closer to the court house of a neighboring county?

FAN Club Research

- Records of other family members may lead to the next generation.
- Research everyone in the locality by the same surname.
- Associates listed in the records help differentiate between people with the same name.
- Pay attention to the neighbors. People often migrated together or moved to a new location because their neighbor went there.

Time Lines

- A time line quickly shows conflicting data.

Timeline for James Watson

17 May 2016

Age	Date	Event
	1782	Tax List: , Washington County, Virginia ¹
	Abt 1793	Marriage: Frances STALLARD (LZGC-98W); Scott County, Virginia ²⁻³
20 Apr	1799	Surveyor's Record: Russell County, Virginia, United States ⁴
28 Oct	1800	Deed: James Watson & Frances to John Richmond.; Russell County, Virginia, United States ⁵
2 ???	1802	Tax List: Russell County, Virginia, United States ⁶⁻⁸
24 Sep	1803	Deed: James Watson & Frances and James Ritchie...; Russell County, Virginia, United States ⁹
2 Jun	1805	Deed: James Watson & Frances to John Edde; Russell County, Virginia, United States ¹⁰
13 Oct	1807	Deed: James Watson & Frances to William Crawford and George Lee...; Russell County, Virginia, United States ¹¹
	1810	Tax List: Russell County, Virginia, United States ¹²
23 Apr	1810	Deed: James Watson witnesses John Ritchie & Nancy to Rawley Stallard; Russell County, Virginia, United States ¹³
30 Sep	1811	Deed: Rawley Stallard & Elizabeth to James Watson.; Russell County, Virginia, United States ¹⁴
28 Oct	1816	Deed: Russell County, Virginia, United States ¹⁵
28 Oct	1816	Deed: Dicey Stallard et al sale of land to James Green; , Scott, Virginia ¹⁵
15 Oct	1819	Deed: James Watson & Frances his wife to George Lee; , Scott, Virginia ¹⁶
	1820	Census: , Floyd, Kentucky ¹⁷

- Historical time lines point out reasons and clues about an ancestor's migration.

Historical Time of Virginia

1710-1740s: Passes across the Blue Ridge mountains leading from eastern Virginia into the Shenandoah Valley were discovered. Emigrants from Pennsylvania and New Jersey began to enter the valley.

1750-1784: Land grants made to the Ohio Company encouraged exploration beyond the Alleghenies. The new area southeast of the Ohio River was organized by Virginia in 1775 as the District of West Augusta, although much of this was ceded to Pennsylvania in 1786.

1754-1763: French and Indian War

1770s: The Wilderness Road opened access across the Cumberland Gap from Virginia into Kentucky. The area that was to become Kentucky was organized as Kentucky County, Virginia, in 1776.

1780s: In 1784, Virginia formally ceded its claims north of the Ohio River to the United States. In 1788 Virginia ratified the United States constitution to become a state.

1792: Kentucky became a separate state.

"Virginia History," FamilySearch Wiki, https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Virginia_History

Brainstorm with a Buddy

- A fresh perspective sometimes sees clues you overlooked.
- Explaining the problem to someone else may trigger new thoughts for research possibilities.

Historical and Genealogical Societies

- Local societies have collections only available onsite.
- Society members are experts in the records of their locality.
- You may have common relatives with society members.

The Genealogical Proof Standard, GPS

The Genealogical Proof Standard (GPS) offers guideline for building solid cases that includes the following steps:

1. "Conduct a reasonably exhaustive search among a variety of records.
2. "Determine the class for each piece of information within the record, i.e., whether it is:
 - "Direct or Indirect evidence
 - "Original or Derivative source
 - "Primary or Secondary information
3. "Weigh each piece of data, keeping in mind WHO furnished the information, and WHY.
4. "Evidence must all point in the same direction. If there is an opposing bit of evidence, its relevance to the question must be negated, or refuted.
5. "If evidence all points in the same direction, and no other reasonable conclusion can be reached, then the case has passed the GPS standard and is considered solid.
6. "Write up the conclusion. Include an explanation of any opposing evidence and how it was resolved. Include citations," (Genealogical Proof Standard, Building a Solid Case by Christine Rose, pg. 18.).

DNA Studies

- YDNA
- MtDNA
- Autosomal DNA

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