Getting the Most from Ancestry.com

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Record Collections

- Census Collection
  - Census records document a person in a place and time with their family, family relationships, ages, birthplaces, and occupations
  - Only place online to find images and indexes for all publicly available U.S., UK, and Canada Census
  - Selected U.S. State Censuses also available
- Immigration Collection
  - Immigration records capture a person as they are traveling to a new country and contain information about who they were traveling with, ages, birthplaces, how much money they had when they came to the country
  - U.S. Passenger Arrival Lists from 100 different ports, covering 1820-1960
  - Naturalization Records
  - Passport Applications
- Military Records
  - WWI Draft Registration Cards
  - WWII Draft Cards & Army Enlistment Records
  - Civil War Service Records & Pension Index
  - Revolutionary War Records
- Birth, Marriage and Death Records (Vital Records or BMD)
  - U.S. - Collection quantity and time frame vary by state
  - UK – BMD Index (Birth, Marriage, Death) 1837-2005, London Marriages 1754-1921
- Other records
  - Family trees submitted by other members (12 million)
  - Historical newspapers
  - Photos and postcards
  - Directories and member lists
  - Court records
  - Family and local histories

Card Catalog

- Card Catalog - Powerful tool that helps you easily identify specific titles on Ancestry.com
  - Can search by title or keyword
  - Can filter down by:
    - Location
    - Record type
    - Date range
    - Language

Record Formats

Five basic formats of the records you'll find on Ancestry.com

- Index and Image
  - We've digitized family history records from original documents, microfilm/microfiche
  - The records are then be indexed, manually
  - Examples -- Census records, Passenger lists
- Index Only
  - Contain only an index, with no attached images to view on Ancestry.com
  - Indexes typically include enough info for you to find/order a copy of the record
  - Examples -- many BMD titles, WWII Army enlistments
- OCR – Optical Character Recognition
  - These titles do not have manually created indexes
  - The computer "reads" the digital image and offers matches it thinks best meet your search criteria
  - Examples – Newspapers, Voter registrations
- Member Contributed
  - Data and information contributed by Ancestry.com members
  - Examples -- Online trees, Member Photos
- Image first

Searching Ancestry.com

Search Strategy 1 – Start with Global Search

- Global Search searches through *all titles and titles* on Ancestry.com
- It's great for, among other things:
  - Beginners just getting started in family history
  - "Low-hanging fruit" records for an ancestor
  - See what you can learn about an individual you know almost nothing
  - Quick to see if anything new been added about an ancestor
- Best *Possible* Matches
  - Global search gives you the best possible matches from all Ancestry.com titles for the search criteria you've entered – sometimes yielding thousands of possible matches
  - Best possible matches are based on proximity
    - 'PROVO' is **typographically** close to 'PROBO'
    - 'CATHARINE' is **phonetically** close to 'KATHAREN'
    - 'JACK' is **culturally** close to 'JOHN'
    - '1880' is **temporally** close to '1881'
    - 'BOSTON' is **spatially** close to 'CAMBRIDGE'
  - Filtering techniques (see below) help weed through some of these results
- You can conduct a Global Search of Ancestry.com from the home page or from the Search tab.
- You might need to go beyond Global Search if…
  - Your ancestor has a very common
  - Your ancestor was recorded with a name different than expected
  - Your ancestor's name was written or indexed incorrectly
  - Records you know (think) should exist are not coming up in Global Search

Search Strategy 2 – Know Your Search Goal

- What are you searching for? Write down your goal
- The Search box is the most important part of your search – it's where your search begins
- Use default, proximity search - or -
- Restrict names to phonetic matches, similar meanings, and/or initials
- Restrict dates and places to exact locations and year ranges
- Restrict search results to certain collections or record types

Search Strategy 3 – Filter Your Searches

- ***NEVER*** feel that you have to look through all 27,000 matches the search returns!!!
- Along the left side of most search-result pages, you'll see two boxes – "Refine Search" and "Narrow by Category"
  - Both of these boxes help you filter your searches, narrow down those 15,000 possible matches into specific records about your ancestor
- Refine Search
  - Click the arrows in this area to expand the search templates so you can add more search criteria that Ancestry.com can use to narrow your search
- Narrow by Category
  - You can use this area to narrow down results first by a record category, then by time period and place
- Exact Search
  - When you check "Exact" search, you're telling Ancestry.com to find records that match some or all criteria exactly – letter for letter, exact year, exact place
  - Caution – if you choose for all pieces of criteria to be matched exactly, Ancestry.com will search for records that include *all* the criteria

Search Strategy 4 – Try a Collection Search

- Searching by collection/category let's you focus on certain types of records – just census records, just military records, just immigration records
- Collection Searches can be helpful when want to find a specific type of record

Search Strategy 5 – Search an Individual Title

- Searching a specific title can be extremely helpful when you're trying to find a specific record about a specific ancestor
- How to access a specific title – LOTS of places
  - The home page, search page, and collection pages all have to titles
- Card Catalog
  - The Card Catalog helps you identify specific titles on Ancestry.com by filtering down by location, record type, date range, and language

Search Strategy 6 – Search Using Your Member Tree

- Member Trees are a great way to search Ancestry.com
  - They can provide a more detailed search than manual searching -- because it is searching for your ancestor in context of his/her family
    - Searches take into account parents, spouses, siblings, children

    - Member Trees offer Ancestry Hints — allows you to let technology find the "low-hanging fruit" records
    - You can search "manually" from your Member Tree — and the tree will pre-populate the search box
- Other Benefits of Member Trees
    - Organize your family history information
    - Upload digitized family photos and documents from personal collections
    - Access records you've already found on Ancestry.com
    - Share your tree with family
    - Connect with other Ancestry.com users working on the same family lines as you
    - Gateway to building family history books/posters with ease
    - Allow you to access your tree from anywhere you have Internet access
    - Secure back up for your family history information
    - Access your member tree from your iPhone – www.ancestry.com/iPhone

Search Strategy 7 – Search Outside the Box

- With exact searches, less is more. Start with a few criteria, then add a bit more and a bit more – to help you narrow down results
- With non-exact searches, more is more. The more info you add about your ancestors, the better results the Ancestry.com search system can find
- Try searching outside the box
    - Play around with various combinations of information you know about your ancestors – you don't always have to search by name, date, place
    - Try just a first name or only a last name (also try both maiden and married names for women)
    - Try an exact search for all the males named John born between 1895 and 1901 in Oregon
    - Try searching for all the Jones families (not exact, so you get the similar last names) living in Washington County (exact) in 1850.