

# Survey of Brick Wall Techniques

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<https://www.ocgsny.net/>

Dennis Hogan, [www.dennisahogan.com](http://www.dennisahogan.com)

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# Notes

- A copy of all slides of this presentation are available on on my site, [www.dennisAhogan.com](http://www.dennisAhogan.com)

# Resources

Code	Title	Author	Copyright	Publisher
FG	Forensic Genealogy	Colleen Fitzpatrick	2005	Rice Book Press Fountain Valley, CA
PS	The Family Tree Problem Solver	Marsha Hoffman Rising	2011	Family Tree Books Cincinnati, OH
AGRT	Advanced Genealogy Research Techniques	George C. Morgan & Drew Smith	2014	McGraw-Hill Education New York, NY
PS3	The Family Tree Problem Solver, 3 <sup>rd</sup> Edition	Marsha Hoffman Rising	2019	Family Tree Books Cincinnati, OH

# Brick Wall - Real or Imagined

- If we say we have a brick wall, are we giving up?
- Should we be giving up?
- There is a school of thought that says we should not use the term because it is defeatist.
- The experts tend to say that there is almost always more research to be done.

# Brick Wall - Causes

- Elizabeth Shown Mills suggests what causes our brick walls:

<https://www.evidenceexplained.com/quicktips/10-ways-we-build-our-own-brick-walls>

PS3 26-45

# My Picks

- 1) Cluster Genealogy
- 2) Re-examine in DETAIL the "facts" you have
- 3) Utilizing Online Hints
- 4) Procure the ORIGINAL documents
- 5) Visit the ancestral community
- 6) Rising's Rule & Distinguishing Multiples with the same name
- 7) Land Records & Maps
- 8) Photo Analysis
- 9) Database Creation & Analysis
- 10) DNA
- 11) Others Topics From PS3

# 1) Cluster Genealogy

- Technique to learn more about an ancestor by examining records left by the ancestor's extended family, friends, neighbors, and other associates.
- "Cluster genealogy is not required in solving all genealogical problems - only the most difficult." - Marsha Hoffman Rising
- Elizabeth Shown Mills refers to this as the FAN Club - Family, Associates, Neighbors

# 1) Cluster Genealogy

- Techniques which complement Cluster Genealogy
  - Whole Family Research
    - Thoroughly research siblings at each level
    - A pre-requisite for Cluster Genealogy
  - Reverse Genealogy/Descendancy Research
    - Search forward (to present day). Find & contact all living descendants of a “brick wall” couple.



# 1) Why do Cluster Genealogy?

- The more people you investigate, the more records you will find. These records may fill holes in research based on your immediate family.
- Patterns will emerge - names, migration, places of origin, destination, occupations.
- Descendants of collateral relatives and associates may have family information that you do not have.
- PS 69-88, PS3 90-112, AGRT 65-83

## 2) Re-examine in **DETAIL** the "facts" you have

- One or more of your "facts" may be incorrect. All it takes is 1 incorrect "fact" to send you on a wild goose chase.
- Start at the beginning and verify every fact and source. (You may want to join the [Genealogy Do-Over](#).)
- Put your problem in writing/Create a research report. This process may expose gaps or inconsistencies. Here is an article from Elizabeth Shown Mills: [http://  
evidenceexplained.com/content/quicklesson-20-research-reports-research-success](http://evidenceexplained.com/content/quicklesson-20-research-reports-research-success)
- Fight the temptation to make assumptions. Take a skeptical approach to every "fact."
- AGRT 1-38

# 3) Utilizing Online Hints

- What is a Hint?
  - The Big 4 (FamilySearch, Ancestry, MyHeritage, FindMyPast) all have huge collections of records and trees.
  - For each person in a tree, the Big 4 search their records and trees.
  - When a "match" is found, a Hint icon shows up in the tree by the person.

# 3) Utilizing Online Hints

- The Big 4 - All offer free tree hosting. You do not have to be a subscriber to receive Hints.
  - Familysearch.org (free site)
    - Hints records only
  - Ancestry.com (subscription site)
    - Hints records, trees & photos
  - MyHeritage.com (subscription site)
    - Hints records & trees
  - FindMyPast.com (subscription site)
    - Hints records only

## 3) Utilizing Online Hints

- Hint searches of the Big 4 are based on the content of your tree on their site.
- Each individual's bmd is used as well as info on parents, siblings, and children.
- Sophisticated search software along with artificial intelligence is used.
- The more content included in your tree, the better the accuracy of your hints.

# 3) Utilizing Online Hints

- Hints are better than Searching
- You can search the Big 4 sites even if you do not subscribe (Search free/Details \$)
  - But you search 1 person at a time which is time consuming.
  - Your search technique probably is not as sophisticated as those used for Hints.
- Hints are automatic (no search time).
  - Hints cover everyone in your tree.

## 3) Utilizing Online Hints

- To see your hints, go to each of the Big 4 sites, login, go to your tree and look through your Hints
- But wouldn't it be nice to see all of your hints in 1 place?
- RootsMagic does this for you. It is a genealogy database program for Windows and Mac and the only one that provides Hints for all of the Big 4.

# 3) Utilizing Online Hints

The screenshot shows a genealogy software interface with a family tree on the left and a 'WebHints' window in the foreground. The family tree includes names like John Francis H..., Charles Albert HOGAN (26 Sep 1905-1), Mary Agnes H..., James DAWSON, Dorothy Louise (16 May 1914-8), Rosa Jane H..., George Edwarc..., George Edwarc (15 Aug 1908-2), Linda DERY, Cecile DESHAIT, RIGNEY, Willi..., and Monica Kathryn. The 'WebHints' window is titled 'WebHints - Charles Albert HOGAN' and contains a table of hints from various providers.

Provider	Total	Pending	Confirmed	Rejected
FamilySearch <i>Find A Grave Index; Florida Death Index, 1877-1998; New York...</i>	<a href="#">7</a>	0	<a href="#">7</a>	0
Findmypast	1	<a href="#">1</a>	0	0
MyHeritage <i>Adds occupation</i> <i>Improves death place, burial place</i>	<a href="#">7</a>	<a href="#">7</a>	0	0

Buttons: Edit Person, Close

PS3 228-238



## 4) Procure the ORIGINAL documents

- Indexes, transcriptions, OCR can all interject mistakes.
- Viewing the original document eliminates some mistakes and usually provides more complete information.
- AGRT 39-63

## 5) Visit the ancestral community

- Only a minuscule percentage of genealogical information is available online.
- Talk to local librarians and historians.
- Visit libraries, historical societies, churches, cemeteries, and repositories.
- You will “stumble across” info that you could never find online.
- PS 34

## 6) Rising's Rule & Distinguishing Multiples with the same name

- Rising's Rule: "Assume there is at least one other person with the same name"
- How do you distinguish amongst multiple people with the same name? Rising describes an eight step process.
- PS 140-157, PS3 172-192

# 7) Land Records & Maps

- Land records are an under utilized tool but they will lead you to in-laws, maiden names, neighbors, and siblings.
- Find maps contemporary with the time frame that you are researching.
- Look for boundaries (& boundary changes). To find records you need to understand the "genealogy" of the states/counties/towns that you are researching.
  - <http://www.mapofus.org/>
  - <http://www.randymajors.com/p/maps.html>
- PS 21, 114, 125-139, PS3 154-171

# 8) Photo Analysis

- Fitzgerald gives many techniques for ferreting info from photos.
- Learn how to enhance images.
  - Save original at highest possible quality. Label it obviously as an original. NEVER modify the original.
  - Make copies of original to try your “enhancements.”
  - Some photos have parts with significantly different characteristics (so making a change helps one part but hurts another). Crop and save multiple portions of the photo and enhance separately the individual portions.
- FG 7-58

# 9) Database Creation & Analysis

- Use a spreadsheet (like MS Excel) or database (like MS Access) in addition to a genealogy-specific database (like FTM).
- These tools allow you to easily sort your file in various ways. Seeing your info in different forms may display gaps in your research and trigger new strategies.
- You might collect something like all German immigrants in a certain area or all Hogan & collateral families.
- FG 76-133

# 10) DNA

- Learn about the different types of tests: Y-DNA, mtDNA, autosomal
- The cost of these tests is decreasing while the benefits are increasing (as the databases increase in size). Soon DNA will be a tool used by all genealogists.
- Autosomal tests may offer the most potential for genealogists, but which type of test is appropriate and who to test depends on the problem you are trying to solve.
- Objective resource: [www.thegeneticgenealogist.com](http://www.thegeneticgenealogist.com)
- FG 145-216 (painful), AGRT 117-142, PS3 239-247

# 11) Others Topics From PS3

- Analysis topics
  - Ch 1, Analyzing Research Problems and Planning Strategies
  - Ch 11, Analyzing Evidence
- Misc topics to fill in the blanks
  - Ch 3, Finding BMD Before Civil Reg
  - Ch 4, Locating Missing Ancestors in the Census
  - Ch 7, Replacing Burned Courthouse Records
  - Ch 10, Finding Pre-1850 Ancestors



# Best of Luck

Your reward for  
solving a brick wall  
is 2 more brick walls!!!