

FAMILY HISTORY GROUP #4 - BUSTING THE BRICK WALLS



Facing the Brick Wall

1. Take another look at your data.
 - a. Go back over your trail of sources
 - b. Check original sources as much as possible. Don't rely on indexes.
 - c. Consider the reliability of all information, especially 'hearsay'
 - d. Give more weight to *primary* over *secondary* sources
 - e. Remember that just because it is written down doesn't mean it's true!
 - f. Look for what you missed or ruled out first time round. The extra experience and knowledge you've gained can help you see information in a new light
2. If the brick wall is still there after you've reviewed your research:
 - a. Broaden your search. Which sources haven't you looked at yet? Try this checklist:
 - [The PatientGenie's DownUnder Check List Template](#) (Google to find it)
 - b. Consider investigating the extended family and neighbours of your ancestor – ie. the 'collateral lines'.
 - c. Get a better understanding of the relevant social history.
 - d. Remember you can't do it all online!
 - e. Call for help via online discussion forums or contact a Genealogy Society.

Common problems

1. Spelling - "Da spellin iz al rong." Use soundex and wildcard searches.
2. Help! I can't read the handwriting!
 - a. Context is everything. Read over the whole document quickly first. Look for similar characters elsewhere. The type of document can provide clues (eg. are religious, legal or medical terms most likely to appear?) Your knowledge of the language will guide you. If it's a specialist language you may need expert help.

Also try:

- b. <http://archivesoutside.records.nsw.gov.au/useful-tips-for-reading-handwritten-documents/>
- c. http://www.ancestry.com.au/wiki/index.php?title=Tips_for_Reading_Old_Handwriting
- d. http://www.ancestry.com.au/wiki/index.php?title=List_of_Frequently_Misread_Letters

3. Clues to dating photographs can be found in:
 - a. The type of photographic process used
 - b. Photographic studio or amateur photography? Is there an imprint?
 - c. Fashion: clothes, shoes, hair, facial hair
 - d. The poses and props used in the picture
 - e. Cars, and other forms of transport
 - f. Street signs and business names – can you match them to Sands & McDougall Directories?

Good resources to get you started include:

- ❖ State Records Office NSW - <http://archivesoutside.records.nsw.gov.au/what-are-your-tips-for-dating-photographs/>
- ❖ Some books on family photos:
 - Jayne Shrimpton:
 - *Family Photographs and How to Date Them* (2008)
 - *Tracing Your Ancestors Through Family Photographs...* (2014)
 - Lenore Frost: *Dating Family Photos: 1850-1920* (1991)

Share them online – Facebook, Pinterest, or websites dedicated to identifying old photos. See: <http://www.cyndislist.com/photos/lost-and-found/?page=3>

4. The information on another tree is not sourced. What should I do?
 - a. Cast a critical eye over their whole tree
 - b. You may choose to take their info as a clue and begin searching for your own supporting documents (which you can then give as your source).
 - c. If you choose to save the information to your own tree you need to note that it came from an unreferenced source.

Hard to Find Ancestors

Family

- ❖ Use your ancestor's family to track them – these are called 'collateral lines': they are your ancestor's siblings, cousins and grandparents etc.
- ❖ It was common for extended family to live in the same neighbourhood, so try browsing census and electoral rolls.
- ❖ Prior to about 1920s adoptions and fostering often happened on an informal basis – extended family are your most likely candidates.
- ❖ Attitudes to 'illegitimate' children have changed. Many babies were passed off as their mother's much younger sibling.

Migration

- ❖ People from the same family or village often migrated to the same place, perhaps over a number of years.
- ❖ Individuals may have anglicised their name, or perhaps shortened a surname in order to "fit in"
 - ❖ Müller becomes Miller, Schmidt becomes Smith.
 - ❖ Giovanni, Juan or Johannes becomes John.
- ❖ This list may help: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglicisation_of_names

Gender

The 'Head of the Household' was a very strong cultural norm for Anglo-Celtic communities - and still is in many cultures. This affected the how information was recorded on many records including census records, birth, death & marriage certificates, some passenger lists, newspaper reports, telephone/post office directories ... and many others.

What can you do?

- ❖ To find the female ancestor you may need to look for the man; her father, husband, brother, son...
 - ❖ Try 'his' military records for his dependents
 - ❖ Pension records, including widow's pension
 - ❖ Try 'his' will or probate records for information on female relatives
 - ❖ Family notices and obituaries usually include family details.
- ❖ Are there records that relate only to her – such as education or employment records?

There are books and online guides that may help. The best known is:

Sharon DeBartolo Carmack: *The Genealogist's Guide to Discovering Your Female Ancestors*, (1998)

Geography

Have the street names or numbering changed? Have the national/state/local boundaries changed? Does the area have a new name?

What can you do?

- ❖ Try cross-referencing maps/plans/real estate material of the area such as those at www.slv.vic.gov.au/ In particular consider whether MMBW plans may help.
- ❖ Sands & McDougall Directories allow you to track an address through time.
- ❖ Look at information held by local history groups and local councils on streets and house numbers. Check local histories of the area.
- ❖ Major cities often have lists of street name changes online: http://www.maps.thehunthouse.com/Streets/Old_to_New_Abolished_London_Street_Names.htm

Economy:

- ❖ Consider the impact of class and the economy on your ancestor's life.
- ❖ Being an orphan is not the only reason that young children lived away from home in the 19th century:
 - ❖ Workhouses, Industrial Schools
 - ❖ Domestic service
 - ❖ Apprenticeships
 - ❖ Farm work
 - ❖ Boarding School

Indigenous Records, Adoption and Child Welfare Records

- ❖ Find & Connect is a web resource that aids access to information on institutional care in Australia. It does not hold individual records, but it can help you find where those records are. It also holds information on general history of institutional care, and on support groups and services.
www.findandconnect.gov.au
- ❖ The Koorie Records Unit at PROV works to increase access and awareness of Aboriginal Records created by governments in Victoria:
www.prov.vic.gov.au/community-programs/koorie-records-unit
- ❖ Victoria's first legal adoptions happened in 1929. PROV holds records and information on adoption law and useful research guides.
www.prov.vic.gov.au/research/adoption-and-wardship

Other bits and bobs...

- ❖ From Abactor to Zytheptherist: A list of old occupations:
www.familyresearcher.co.uk/glossary/Dictionary-of-Old-Occupations-Index.html
- ❖ Lists of common mistakes:
www.slideshare.net/genealogybank/spot-avoid-9genealogymistakeserrorsgenealogybank
http://genealogy.lovetoknow.com/Top_Ten_Genealogy_Research_Mistakes
- ❖ Gateway sites such as www.coraweb.com.au and www.cyndislist.com can take you to new sources.

What about DNA testing?

Genealogical DNA testing is different to medical DNA testing. You send a cheek swab or saliva sample through mail, you results will arrive online. Testing companies keep the results and link you to people who share your ancestry on ongoing basis. Autosomal DNA testing will reveal your ethnic origins up to a few thousand years ago. Testing can also match you to relatives 5-6 generations ago and assist you to confirm or disprove the written record. Check out this excellent guide for Australian genealogists: <http://www.genie1.com.au/blog/51-introduction-to-using-dna-for-genealogy>

The Genealogy Societies have Special Interest Groups that can help you navigate your way around records from a particular region or period in history.

- ❖ Genealogical Society of Victoria, Level B1, 257 Collins St, Melbourne.
www.gsv.org.au
 - ❖ Australian Institute of Genealogical Studies, 1/41 Railway Rd, Blackburn.
www.aigs.org.au
- Also try forums and message boards such as:
<http://boards.ancestry.com.au/>