Karen's genealogy tips and links

karengenguide@gmail.com

1**. Name spellings will vary greatly.** Spelling wasn't as important back then as it is now, and many people didn't know how to spell. When looking for ancestors we sometimes have to use different spellings. Think about how the name sounds, in your head and out loud, especially foreign names. I've heard of documents on which the same person's name is spelled 4 different ways on the same document. This link is one of many that talks about this subject:

http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~rwguide/lesson8.htm

There are some things that will help with this problem. One is the wildcard search - use the * to replace several characters, this broadens the search and will allow for spellings you may not think of. For example: lu*r for Lussier. Another option is to use a question mark to replace a single character. For example, sm?th to capture different spellings of Smith (Smyth, etc.). These blog articles provide further explanation and examples:

https://blogs.ancestry.com/ancestry/2010/01/04/ancestry-search-improved-wildcard-flexibility/

https://familysearch.org/blog/en/searching-wildcards-familysearch-2/

Generally, databases created specifically for genealogy research already automatically search for variations (unless you tell it to search for an exact match). However it can still help to try them in these databases, and it's especially useful when using search engines such as Google.

2. **Use timelines.** When gathering information about an ancestor, put the basic facts (or what you think may be facts) in chronological order. This helps you to see what you actually have, and what you need to find. It's also incredibly helpful in seeing patterns, or giving clues about an ancestor. When I did this with my g-g-grandfather I noticed how many deaths he'd had in his family. Things like that help us figure out what was going on in their lives and why they made the choices they did, as well as giving clues to what they may have done/where they may have gone that we don't know about yet. It also helped me keep track of where he was and when, which helps determine where to go to get more information/records.

3. **FAN principle: friends, associates, neighbors.** Make note of non-direct family members, as well as neighbors and associates. Sometimes our direct ancestors are tough to find, but if you know siblings, aunts and uncles, etc., you may find your ancestor through them. Maybe a g-g-g- grandfather is staying with his uncle. Or a marriage may have been performed in an aunt's house. One of my ancestors was orphaned; he was taken in by his grandmother, then by his uncle after she also died. Maybe a sibling moved across the country; your ancestor may have moved, too. Neighbors may be relatives with different last names (especially for women), or fellow immigrants from the "old country". Maybe your ancestor's ancestral town or region isn't specified, but the neighbors' is. It's a clue worth checking into. Also, parents' names may not be listed on your ancestor's records, but might be on the siblings' records.

4. **Keep track of your research.** I'll admit to not always doing this as well as I should, however it's very helpful to know what you've already checked so you don't waste time looking at the same things. I do make note of who I've called for records and the results, as well as the date. Also, any family stories, etc., again with the date and who I heard it from. I also try to make sure I get source information for any information I acquire. This ensures

that you can keep track of where information came from so later on you aren't left to wonder where that birth date came from. Just as importantly, it provides a trail for other researchers to follow, and gives credence to your research. We should all be doing this for everything- any searches we do (including online), interviews, trips to libraries/courthouses, etc. and what resources we used there plus what we did or did not find. There are free research logs (and other charts) available at the following websites, or you can create your own:

http://www.ancestry.com/download/charts#ancchart

https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Research_Forms

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1PAADC5XkLINPktjuacfxr0f6RcL_C0DO_3g-d8bhzWQ/edit#gid=1096784801

5. **SOURCES!!!** Don't just assume that online trees or any person are actually correct. It's one thing when my Nana is telling stories about things and people she actually knew, but something else when she's passing along stories she was told by someone else. We need to assume that any information could be wrong. Even those family stories may not be entirely correct (our memories are faulty!); it depends on the story. It's likely that Nana's story of how she and Grandpa met is correct, but maybe that story of g-uncle Charles Brown being murdered isn't exactly as my g-aunt Beulah told it, even though one of the people she heard it from was actually living at the time of the alleged murder. Online trees are especially notorious for being full of errors. Compilations also tend to have some errors. Always find documents to back up the information, but never assume that a certain amount of documents is enough. I'll make that #6...

6. **A document is only as good as the person giving the information.** You could find 5 documents giving a particular death date, but if they're all from the same source and that source is wrong, then all 5 are wrong. There have been cases of headstones having wrong dates. Also, the person giving the information may not have been there, or just not known names of people; for example- I wasn't there when my dad was born so I wouldn't know that he was actually born in S.C. If I hadn't been told and I was the one filling out the death certificate, I'd have it all wrong. Also, some people don't know their grandparents' names, or they just get confused in their grief. One son had put his parents' names in place of his mother's parents. Furthermore, there are differences between direct and indirect sources, primary and secondary, which you can learn about through the links at this site: http://www.cyndislist.com/evidence/articles/

7. **Get organized and back it up!** It doesn't matter how you do it, whatever works for you. Just keep in mind when naming things that you might end up sharing some files, and other people may not know who Grandpa Richard is. Use full names. How you organize your records will be a personal preference; Geoff from Legacyfamilytree does his by location, some people may try to do it by surname. I prefer sorting by type of document and I name each document by surname, then first name followed by the name of the specific collection from which I got the document. However you do it, make sure you back it up on an external hard drive or in the cloud or whatever else. It would really be a shame to lose all the information!

8. **Not everything is online, in fact most information is not.** Make use of libraries, historical societies, courthouses, etc. Plan ahead by checking hours and any restrictions, especially as some places don't allow cameras, scanners, or even notebooks. You'll also want to know about any fees for making copies.

9. **Make use of forums and message boards, and don't be afraid to contact people.** Sometimes you find that puzzle piece from some distant relative you never knew about, or someone who's not even related but just

happens to be researching the area or family. You may get a response within days, or it may be a few years. It's worth it, even in the latter case. Most of the time when I send messages or replies to queries that are old, I don't get a response. However, when I came across a 3 year old query about my ancestors, I took the chance and sent a message to the email address listed. I got a response just hours later and that connection was a big break-through in that line. That not-too-distant cousin and I still communicate occasionally.

10. **It helps to know a little history.** You don't need to be an expert, but do keep things in perspective because what was happening in the time period (locally and nationally) will affect your ancestors and their choices. Events, modes of travel, types of jobs, boundary changes, etc. all had an impact on people's lives. A presenter at a seminar mentioned that his ancestor's 8 children were all born in different European countries, yet they were all born in the same house. He had to learn about which country that town was in at different periods of time. Make use of maps and old town histories to learn about the area in which your ancestor lived. You can find some books online, some can be downloaded as PDF's at these websites:

https://archive.org/details/texts

http://books.google.com/

http://www.cyndislist.com/books/ebooks/

Some popular websites for maps:

http://publications.newberry.org/ahcbp/index.html

http://www.davidrumsey.com/

http://www.oldmapsonline.org/

11. **Learn about the sources you're using** in order to save yourself time and frustration. Ancestry has a source description for each collection so you'll want to read that before even doing a search. It may turn out that the collection doesn't even include the dates or locations you're looking for. Regardless of where you're researching, having an understanding of the records will allow you to better interpret the information you find, and help you determine what related records may be available.

Some useful sites (in no particular order):

http://www.genealogyintime.com/articles/top-100-genealogy-websites-of-2016-page01.html : Family Tree magazine does a list of the top genealogy sites each year. You can get a PDF version with clickable links. This list indicates the type of site and whether it's free or fee based.

http://www.cyndislist.com/ : This database has thousands of links, all well organized, and is considered the go-to place for genealogy. It's basically a card catalogue for genealogy websites. If you're not sure where to look for any particular topic, you can go here and use the categories list or the search bar. Free to use. Some of the links will be to paid sites, but Cyndi uses a dollar sign icon to indicate when this is the case.

https://familysearch.org/ : They have many records as well as a learning center. The site is free to search and there are some images along with the indexes. Microfilms can be ordered, for a small fee, for those documents that are not available online. They're sent to your nearest Family History Center.

http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/ : This started as a free grassroots site, is now owned by ancestry, but still

free and another good resource.

http://genealogytipoftheday.com/ : A useful site with very short tips on all kinds of subjects. Sometimes simple is the most helpful. You can also get tips by email or by "liking" the page on facebook so it just shows up in your newsfeed.

http://searchtip.genealogytipoftheday.com/ : Same as above, except specifically about searching.

http://www.legacyfamilytree.com/ : My choice of family tree software. The standard version is free.

http://www.familytreewebinars.com/ : Presented most Wednesdays and some Fridays, these videos cover a wide variety of topics. They're about 90 minutes long (one hour presentation, plus introductions and Q & A). Live presentations are free, and each webinar is available for free for the first 6 days thereafter, though you can get monthly or annual subscription for only $45-49 per year.

http://www.archives.gov/research/genealogy/start-research/ : The national archives has many resources and tips. They also do a virtual genealogy fair each year, another terrific learning opportunity. You can also order military records through the website.

http://legalgenealogist.com/ : If you need to know anything about laws or courthouses, this is the place to go.

https://www.evidenceexplained.com/ : This is an excellent website for learning about sources and analyzing evidence. The book of the same name is considered a must-have item in any genealogy library.

https://archive.org/: One of my favorite sites to use. You'll find free material (out of copyright) of all kinds from books to videos. These are generally available for download in various formats. The census records are also here, though not indexed. It's not the easiest site to navigate or search, but it's worth using. I've also frequently used the Wayback Machine to find archived versions of webpages that are no longer working, though not all websites/pages will be archived.

http://www.ancestry.com/ : Even without a subscription you can get a lot of use from this site. They do actually have some free things, including the learning center, research guides, and building family trees.

http://search.ancestry.com/search/group/freeindexacom : A list of free databases in ancestry.com (scroll down below the search boxes).

http://c.ancestry.com/cs/media/social-genealogy-toolkit-2.pdf : Ancestry's genealogy toolkit has many useful links to a variety of genealogy sites and can be downloaded.

https://www.youtube.com/user/AncestryCom : Ancestry's youtube channel has terrific videos to help you learn about a variety of topics. Most are about 30 minutes, plus there are some 5 Minute Finds videos. All are free. Click on the "Playlist" tab to see their list of categorized videos. I especially recommend the Desktop Education Series, 5 Minute Find Series, and Successful Searching on Ancestry (you may have to click "load more" to see all playlists).