

A name not only identifies a person, but sometimes describes an ancestral occupation or background. There are many types of names – middle, surname, given – and even those assigned through religious rituals such as a confirmation name. A full understanding of a name allows you improve your genealogy research.



Name Record Sets

- Census records.** The names of all household members were not listed until the 1850 US Federal Census. The results vary for different state censuses.
- Vital records.** For marriage records, some states don't list parents' names or only during later periods; also check for names of witnesses. For death records, pay close attention to the name of the informant, the physician and funeral director.
- Newspapers.** Names can be found in a variety of locations including legal notices, personals, and more.
- Property records.** The legal name of a person is likely to be found in property records especially those involving a legal transaction.
- Military records.** Draft and registration cards list the address for the person registering. Pension records will also list the address of record for a pension recipient.
- Passenger Lists.** Names on passenger lists were required to match up with actual passengers before leaving for the United States. Any name changes likely took place after arrival.
- Church and synagogue records.** Check witness or sponsor names on sacramental records such as baptism and confirmation.
- City and business directories.** Locate names in directories and families grouped together. Also check advertisements in the directories.

Name Research Strategies

- Determine surname variations.** The current form for a surname may be a derivative of its original form. Determine all possible variations and use them in your research.
- Understand birth name order.** Some ethnicities use a formula for naming children depending upon the birth order such as the first male child is named after the father's father. Also, some cultures will re-use a name if a child has died.
- Don't forget nicknames!** Ancestors had nicknames too. They may not be familiar to you so access resources such as **Wolfram-Alpha** where you can determine the variety of nicknames for a given name.
- Set up a one name study.** Create a group on Facebook or start a blog with a focus on researching all descendants with the surname.
- Look for ethnic practices related to name usage.** Some cultures use a confirmation name after the child has been recognized as an adult in the church. Also, the use of the middle name instead of the given name.
- Cluster maps.** Use Google Maps to pin locations where your ancestor surnames can be found. Look for groupings of names in different areas. A visual depiction of cluster research data can help your research.

Check out the **Researching Names Resource List** on the back page!

Researching Names Resource List

- **Ancestry: Last Name Meanings and History**
<https://www.ancestry.com/learn/facts>
- **Cyndi's List: Names**
<https://www.cyndislist.com/directories/>
- **Google Maps**
<https://maps.google.com>
- **Spelling Substitution Tables for the United States and Canada**
<https://abundantgenealogy.com/spelling-sub-table>
- **Tagul**
<https://tagul.com>
- **The Guild of One-Name Studies**
<https://one-name.org/>
- **Traditional Nicknames in Old Documents**
[https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Traditional Nicknames in Old Documents - A Wiki List](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Traditional_Nicknames_in_Old_Documents_-_A_Wiki_List)
- **Translations of Female Given Names in Multiple Languages**
[https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Appendix:Translations of female given names in multiple languages](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Appendix:Translations_of_female_given_names_in_multiple_languages)
- **Translations of Male Given Names in Multiple Languages**
[https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Appendix:Translations of male given names in multiple languages](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Appendix:Translations_of_male_given_names_in_multiple_languages)
- **Wolfram-Alpha**
<https://www.wolframalpha.com>
- **Wordle**
<https://www.wordle.net>