

Brick Wall Breakthroughs

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Want to see first-hand how to break through that persistent “brick wall” in genealogy? Using actual research problems submitted by webinar attendees, professional genealogist Thomas MacEntee will walk participants through a step-by-step research methodology process to find clues and possible solutions. Participants will have access to research logs, digital images and more during and after the webinar. Also included is a “habit recipe” to implement the same techniques used in the webinar on your own genealogy research.

Brick Walls in Genealogy – Why Do We Have Them?

Often, a brick wall is just a speed bump. And one that we unknowingly construct ourselves. Keep in mind that you need to be open to new research techniques, break old research habits, and seek out new record sets. This is often outside our comfort zone.

Step-By-Step Methodology Review

While each webinar covering Brick Wall Breakthroughs is unique, here is a universal list of methodology to do's for each record:

- **Create a To Do List** to capture new clues and stay focused. A great way to remember where you left off in terms of research.
- **Use a research log or tracking system!** Tracking all the details needed to formulate a proof for the research question. For “When was John Ralph AUSTIN born,” I list when I found a record, where I found it, name of record, an abstract of information, etc.
- **Download and save images right away!** And use a **File Naming Convention** so you always know what's in the file you are opening down the road.
- **Don't assume and don't guess!** Use the **FamilySearch Research Wiki** to look up terms or learn about the quirks in an unfamiliar record set.
- **Consider a Mind Map to visual research issues.** It can be difficult to see gaps in your research when using a spreadsheet or even genealogy software. Use a free program like **Popplet** to create a quick mind map.
- **Perform a reasonably exhaustive search!** This doesn't mean you must cover EVERYTHING but a focused list of sources helps. Use the **Genealogy Research Checklist** in the Resource List below.

Uncovering the Secret Records for Online Genealogy Sites

Records on genealogy websites are not “secret” necessarily; it just seems that they can be difficult to locate or may not show up in a basic search.

- **Use the Ancestry Card Catalog feature.** Most professional genealogists who use Ancestry will tell you that their first stop is the [Ancestry Card Catalog](#). Searching via the Card Catalog is best if you are looking for a specific record within a specific database. Enter a term in the keywords field such as “New York” and you’ll find a list of Ancestry databases related to New York. Once you’ve located a database then search within those records.
- **Use the FamilySearch Catalog feature.** Similar to the Ancestry Card Catalog, the FamilySearch catalog will also help you locate a variety of records including digital books, microfilms and more.
- **Check other sites for a catalog listing of databases.** Don’t forget that sites like MyHeritage, Findmypast, and others all have a catalog feature!
- **Use Google Search site search.** If you’re still having trouble finding a record database, consider using the site search function at Google. There are times when Google will do a better job of indexing information on a site, so use this search syntax in Google: **site:[site name] search term**. Example: **site:ancestry.com World War I draft cards** will get you to the [U.S., World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918](#) database on Ancestry.

Habit Recipe

So, what is a “habit recipe?” Well, in recent educational initiatives, online educators have created a tool for actionable education. The habit recipe concept is based on the **Tiny Habits** website (<https://www.tinyhabits.com/welcome>) and the goal of changing behaviors. In a way, that’s what is needed for genealogical research ... learning new habits to replace old habits slowing you down. Brick walls come down through improved research methodology and working “smarter” not “harder.”

A tiny habit is one you do 1) at least once a day; 2) takes 30 seconds or less to perform; and 3) does not take much effort. If we were to tweak this for brick wall busting, how about this:

- A research technique you use frequently like every day.
- A technique that takes a max of 5 minutes.
- And one that is easy to remember and perform and ... saves time as well as makes progress on your research.

Examples:

- Using a research log and remembering to create a link to an online record.
- Remembering to always download a record image before using it for clues.
- Remembering to place new clues in a To Do List.

Resource List

- **Ancestry Card Catalog**
<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/catalog/>
- **Ancestry.com's Research Extract**
<http://www.ancestry.com/trees/charts/researchext.aspx>
- **Evernote**
<http://www.evernote.com>
- **Evidence Explained**
<https://www.evidenceexplained.com>
- **Free Genealogy Forms and Charts**
<http://www.genealogysearch.org/free/forms.html>
- **Genealogy Research Checklist – Excel**
<https://genealogybargains.com/genchecklist-excel>
- **Genealogy Research Log** (Excel download)
<https://genealogybargains.s3.amazonaws.com/Genealogy+Research+Log.xls>
- **Popplet** (mind mapping)
<https://www.popplet.com>
- **Timetoast** (timelines)
<https://www.timetoast.com>
- **Tiny Habits**
<https://www.tinyhabits.com/welcome>
- **Trello**
<https://trello.com>
- **Zotero**
<http://www.zotero.org>