


TURN YOUR BRICK WALL INTO A YELLOW BRICK ROAD

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In genealogy, we encounter tough problems. They don't have to be brick walls that stop progress... we can find "yellow brick roads" that lead to answers.

A brick wall is defined as a genealogical question that is unanswered after exhaustive research. You have a brick wall only if you can answer "yes" to ALL of these:

- Have you exhausted all online sources? Yes / No
- Have you used checklists and research guides for your research location? Yes / No
- Have you consulted an expert about other possible sources you may have missed? Yes / No
- Have you researched OFFline records, microfilm (courthouses, archives, etc) ? Yes / No
- Do you have a burned (destroyed) courthouse or "missing" records? Yes / No
- Have you substituted for missing data, i.e., tax records for a missing census? Yes / No
- Have you tried cluster/collateral relative research? Yes / No
- Have you reached the very, very end of written records? Yes / No

Make a Plan

- Write a research question and make a WRITTEN plan to check every resource
- Continually work to expand your "to do" list
- Include ways to implement your plan
- Make a plan to move forward down a yellow brick road... not to stay behind the brick wall

Change Your Mindset

- What you think shapes everything else. Think of opportunity instead of dead ends.
- The mind is constantly working to solve problems, even when you are not aware that it is.
- Have you ever been unable to puzzle something out and then later, when you were no longer aware that you were thinking of it, the answer suddenly hit you? Genealogy problems work the same way – unless you've convinced your "background brain" through negative thinking that it really is a "brick wall" (unsolvable), so there's no need to continue thinking about it.



Take a Break to Reset Your Brain

- Make sure your documentation is current, and then...
- Put it out of your mind for a while
- Don't dwell on it
- Gain objectivity by giving your mind a break

PRINT OUT Records and Information to Study

- Paper is better than electronic screens when studying and analyzing
- Use more mental and physical energy to read for comprehension from screens
- Electronic screens do not allow you to hold papers or highlight, underline, etc.

Use Friends and Colleagues as a Resource

- Have a genealogy buddy review your research
- Exchange hour for hour work with another genealogist
- Find a genealogy round table... ask for ideas

Have You Found Everything?

- You can only solve your research problem by having access to the answer, which may cost money (subscriptions, travel, research costs, record fees, etc.)
 - If you have not exhausted all avenues, paid and unpaid, you may NOT have a brick wall. Your answer may very well be in a paid database or in a county two states over.
- Understanding your target's socio-economic standing may help you gauge whether they generated many or few records. Wealth generates records.
- Have you researched collateral relatives? Have you used "cluster" research to research people who were close to them? (clusters = groups like churches, friends, neighbors)
- Research the area's history to learn about your ancestor's day to day life
- Re-search (search again) in databases that update regularly

Analyzing Your Documents

- Create timelines from your documents. Are there "missing" chunks of time? Why?
- Take everything out of your file. Re-Sort/Re-Organize it.
- Re-Examine every word on every shred of paper.

Most Common Oversights

- DEATH CERTIFICATES!!! For your target ancestor and for their family members
- Details within documents/sources are frequently missed
- Not writing out a narrative of research
- Only using "free" genealogy resources is very limiting
- No collateral relative or cluster research

Research Techniques

- Use first name searches
- Use family profile searches
- Read the census line by line
- Use multiple sites' indices
- Follow other family members' migrations
- Follow families who marry into your family
- Use commonly overlooked clues (occupation, education, wealth, neighborhood profiles)