Search vs. Research

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Using a defined, repeatable research process leads to being more accurate, effective, and efficient.

Definitions

- Search – "Try to find something by looking or otherwise seeking carefully and thoroughly."[1]
- Research – "The systematic investigation into and study of materials and sources in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions."[2]
- Searching is one step in the research process.

Genealogy Proof Standard

The Genealogy Proof Standard was developed and published by the Board of Certification of Genealogists. It provides best practices to incorporate into the research process to ensure sound research:

1. Reasonably exhaustive research.
   a. Include a wide variety of relevant sources for the location and time period.
   b. Use original records when possible.
2. Complete and accurate source citations for all information used to answer the research question.
   a. Show research extent and quality of sources.
   b. Enables others to locate the source.
3. Thorough analysis and correlation.
   a. Assess the quality of evidence.
   b. Determine if evidence answers the research question.
4. Resolution of conflicting evidence.
   a. Records that don't agree with each other.
   b. Records that don't agree with the hypothesis.
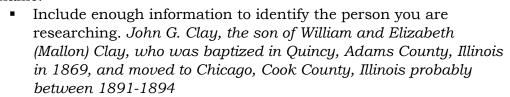5. Soundly written conclusion based on the strongest evidence.

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[1] *Google* Dictionary definition from Oxford Languages.
[2] *Google* Dictionary definition from Oxford Languages.

a. Writing identifies holes in research and how the evidence leads to the conclusion.

b. Writing preserves your research results.

The Research Process

- Determine which ancestor to focus on in the research project.
- Compile background information already gathered.
    - Review previous research projects.
    - Home sources or family stories.
    - Include source citations to document background information.
- Identify the research question or goal.
    - Often about an identity, event, or relationship.
    - Research is about a person, not a name.
        - Include enough information to identify the person you are researching. *John G. Clay, the son of William and Elizabeth (Mallon) Clay, who was baptized in Quincy, Adams County, Illinois in 1869, and moved to Chicago, Cook County, Illinois probably between 1891-1894*
    - Include the information you are looking for.
        - Instead of *Who was John G. Clay?* ask about an aspect of his life or event *Where, when, and how did John G. Clay die?*
- Identify sources to search and where they are located. (GPS 1)
    - Sources vary by geographic location and time period. Research the location before you begin your research to answer your question to determine if the records you think will provide information and evidence exist and find out where they are.
        - *FamilySearch* Research Wiki
        - *US GenWeb*
        - *Cyndi's List*
        - Local genealogy and historical societies
        - Local Libraries
        - State Archives and Libraries
        - Published Research Guides
    - Start with a few sources. You can add more as you work through your plan based on the research results.
- Search based on your plan.
- Record and analyze the results of your research. (GPS 3)

- - Record the source citation (GPS 2)
    - Helps you understand the source and the people you are researching.
    - Record citations for negative results as well as positive.
    - Provides reliability and credibility to your research – the quantity and quality of sources used.
    - Helps determine how to resolve conflicting information.
  - Carefully review to determine the validity of the source.
    - Why was it created?
    - Has it been altered?
    - Does it contain all the information?
  - Determine what information it provides and how accurate it might be.
    - Who was the informant?
    - Did they have first-hand knowledge of the event?
    - How close to the time of the event was it created?
    - Is there a reason the informant might not have told the truth?
  - Evaluate the evidence to determine if it answers your research question.
    - Is there direct evidence to answer your research question?
    - If it doesn't do you have sufficient indirect evidence to reach a conclusion?
    - Determine the meaning of negative evidence.
  - Compare the information to other sources and resolve any conflicting evidence. (GPS 3 & 4)
  - Amend your plan if needed.
- Write up your conclusion. (GPS 5)
  - Did you answer your research question?
  - Did you resolve any conflicting evidence?
  - If you are using indirect evidence, why do you think it answers your research question?
- Determine next steps.
  - Did your research result in more questions that need to be answered?
  - Are there other sources that you should consult?
- Once your research question is answered preserve the story. Share it with family members, the local genealogical society, post a blog article, etc.

Research Template

1. Date

2. Subject – Person(s) you will be researching.

3. Background –
    a. What you already know about the subject with source citations.

4. Research Question - Specific goal for this project.

5. Summary – Fill in your conclusion and reasoning after the research is completed.

6. Location(s) –
    a. Where you will focus your research.
    b. This can change as you search based on research results.

7. Research Strategy/Repositories –
    a. Where you will search and what you are looking for.
    b. This can change as you conduct the search based on what you find.

8. Detailed Sources – For each source; include sources where you don't find anything.
    a. Record Description
    b. Source citation
    c. Image if applicable
    d. Abstract or Transcription
    e. Analysis

9. Next Steps
    a. If you didn't answer your research question, what other sources might contain information?
    b. If you answered your research question, are there other aspects of this ancestor's life you want to research?
    c. Parking lot for information you find during your research that isn't related to the research question.