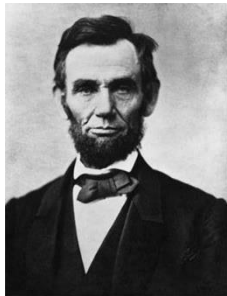


How Not to Do Genealogy: A look at common mistakes beginners (and some experienced) make in conducting their research

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I often tell people I earned a Ph. D. in D-U-M-B (I stole that line from Dave Ramsey). I made so many dumb mistakes when I started doing my own genealogy over 30 years ago. As a professional researcher and teacher, I see even more mistakes as I am conducting research either for myself or for clients. Since people learn from their mistakes and truly smart people save time and frustration by learning from other people's mistakes, today you will learn several mistakes to avoid.



“Don't believe everything you read on the Internet just because there's a picture with a quote next to it.”

—Abraham Lincoln

We must start with this one because we will be coming back to it again and again and again (get the hint?). Just because something is on the internet does NOT make it a fact. Just because someone else has done 'research' and put that document or other piece of information up does not relinquish your responsibility to thoroughly review

and confirm that the information pertains to your person of interest and is correct. As I said, we will revisit this many times. However, we will start with some other mistakes.

WAYS TO NOT DO GENEALOGY

1. Ignoring and not showing siblings and extended family. Are you including ALL members of the family (all spouses and steps) on your family tree? Especially online?
2. Not checking to see if the information pertains to another person with the same or similar name. However, I have seen an actual man married twice who had two sons named William, a daughter named Billie, and two daughters named Sarah.
3. Ignoring DNA absolutes. In the county I live in, there is a prominent family named Blackwell, their Haplogroup is R1B. A Blackwell client of mine is R1A, which means any meaningful Blackwell relationship goes back thousands of years.

4. Believing grave markers are accurate. They are notoriously wrong and even in 2011 I made the VA completely remake my wife's stone because it had her DoB wrong.
5. Assuming all records have been digitized. They are NOT! When FHL and others went in and digitized records they decided what they thought sufficiently important and left the rest.
6. Accepting typed records and indexes older than 1868 as accurate. The WPA transcribed and typed many old records in the 1930s and mistakes were made.
7. Overlooking records because it will take too long to obtain. It may take months to obtain a pension record but you should still request it. Part two Believing NARA saying the records were destroyed in the fire. They might just need to go through remediation.
8. Stopping because you THINK you found the final answer. You ALWAYS want to look at each and every piece of paper in the estate loose papers folders, etc. You may otherwise overlook other siblings, spouses, deaths of a child, etc.
9. Failing to consider historical events of the day. Young men ran away from home and lied to join the military. Women frequently changed their names slightly and eloped with their beau.
10. Assuming an alphabetical list is accurate. These are typically secondary information because they are copied from the originals.
11. Assuming everything you need is online*. You may be able to answer your main questions with online resources only but you may also overlook other great information.
12. Assuming an official record is accurate. Many historical birth certificates were NOT done in a hospital but at the courthouse after the child was born on the family farm.
13. Assuming a family Bible is accurate. Did great grandma lie to cover up being pregnant when she and great grandpa married?
14. Designing your research for the outcome you want*. We may all wish to be related to someone famous or already approved for a lineage society and people may design a research plan that gives the outcome they want.

15. Not understanding the legal definition or significance. Many legal terms have changed over the decades and centuries so know what that term meant at the time. Also, what was the legal significance such as a male turning 21 and now being required to pay the poll tax or eligible to serve on a jury, etc?
16. Forgetting that boundaries changed over time. State, County, and even City lines have changed. Check with the municipality that was in control at the time of the event.
17. Putting living people on a tree as 'Private' but still giving the full name. Such as attaching an artifact such as a child's death certificate without redacting the information.

"The believing everything online problems"

18. Assuming others' trees are accurate. They often are not!
19. Assuming parentage. Did they freeze his sperm or her egg? How did the father (or mother) have the kids after they died?
20. Not validating the 'source' or 'record' you put in your tree. Was that baby born and raised in Georgia by parents who were born and died in Georgia really baptized in London, England? I cannot tell you how many times I see people putting baptismal, marriage, and other records from another country when the family never left this continent.
21. Again, not verifying records or sources in your file. Why is there a Civil War Pension application from PA for a man who served in the Revolutionary War in SC? Was he 110 or more?
22. Did that person really travel out of the country? Again, you must verify each part to ensure it is the same person.
23. Was that man a bigamist and fathering all those children? Or was it another man with the same name?
24. Not citing your sources! You must list the source of your record supporting your claim such that someone else can locate the same record.

* Indicates items out of sync with presentation

Online Researching

- www.Ancestry.com – Pay Site (sometimes available at public libraries)
- www.Fold3.com – Pay Site, owned by Ancestry.com (sometimes available at public libraries)
- www.Newspapers.com – Pay Site, owned by Ancestry.com
- www.Findagrave.com – Free Site, owned by Ancestry.com
- www.Genealogy.com – Pay Site
- www.MyFamily.com – Pay Site
- www.FamilySearch.org - Free Site – Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints
- www.USGenWeb.com - Free Site run by volunteers from each county
- www.Rootsweb.com – Mostly Free, owned by Ancestry.com
- <https://billiongraves.com> – Partly Free Site

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