



## Grandma, Who Are You?

*You think you've checked all the obvious sources for your ancestor's maiden name, but have you? If you haven't checked every possible record and uncovered every possible clue, you aren't yet through. What you are looking for will depend on the time period and the place. In some cases it might be a hopeless endeavor, but then again you might be pleasantly surprised with an answer that will take you back more than one generation*

The following list is meant to spark your creativity.

**Home Sources** – As with every search for your genealogical roots, start at home. Not just your home, you probably would have found the answer if it was there. You need to have every known relative look in their homes. Ask them to look for actual records, of course, but also suggest that they look for:

- **Funeral cards** – Check out everyone found, they might be relatives
- **Photos** – Look for labels on the back. Even if there are no names, is there a photographer that would help pinpoint a place. Even given names only can help you decide if you are looking at the right family.
- **Scrapbooks** – Cull them for clues to family
- **Book name plates** – Often books passed through families, if there is an unknown surname in the collection, investigate it.
- **Bible records** – Look especially for marriages, but also note references to churches, ministers and sponsors. If you are really lucky, spouse maiden names and birthdays have been added.
- **Letters** – Check for postmarks, references to family names and locations.
- **Diaries** – Family names and events that might pinpoint a place. Don't forget to have them check their bookshelves for collected books about the family. You'll find a list of possible published resources below.
- **Oral tradition** – check out those family stories. They might be correct and even if not might give clues as to your ancestors origin.

**Vital Records** - [Town, city, county, state, country] Governments generally did not keep vital records before the nineteenth century although you might find New England town records dating well before 1800. Look for burial records as well.

- **Marriage** [Civil, Church, Court, Newspapers]
  - License [Civil, Church]
  - Certificates [Civil, Church]
  - Registers [Civil, Church]
  - Affidavits [Civil]
  - Banns [Church]
  - Announcements [Church, Newspapers]
  - Marriage Bonds - an obligation to pay the sum of the bond if an impediment to the marriage is found to exist. Amounts vary according to time and place. The bond is filed in bride's county of residence. Bondsman might be a family member. [Court, Newspapers]

- **Death and Estate Records** [Vital registrations, mortuary, cemeteries, obituaries, probate, guardianships]
  - Death Records [don't forget to look at witnesses]
    - Woman
    - Her children
    - Husbands death certificate might give wife's maiden name
    - Known sisters [if you know brothers you aren't looking]
  - Mortuary - who paid for funeral, pallbearers etc.
  - Cemetery
    - Maiden name on stone
    - Who else is in the same plot
    - Who is in nearby plots - ask in office whose buried as there might not be stones.
    - Name of person who erected stone, paid for burial, owned plot
  - Obituary [see newspapers]
  - Probate and Guardianships [self, spouse, spouse parents, all possible parents, sisters and all their relatives]
    - Married names of daughters.
    - In-laws named or in-laws probates
    - If no every name index look for land transfers to family and newspaper notices
    - Probates of all likely parents
    - Relinquishment of widow's portion
    - Relative posting bond when husband dies
    - Guardianships for minor children
- **Birth & Christening of Children** [watch for sponsors]
- **Indexes** – In the US look for statewide, county, city and town indexes; in other countries look for countrywide indexes for civil records.

**Church Records** - Be creative. Check for sponsors as they might be family members. Maiden names for women are often given.

- See Vital Records
- Membership lists - If only the woman is a member other members might be family
- Bulletins - The bulletin for the husband's church might give information on a marriage that took place in the bride's hometown. Also, look for banns and announcements.
- Minutes - Church minutes can give information on births, marriages and deaths. They might also give information about new members.
- Transfers - a newly married woman might have a transfer from her previous church. Her maiden name might be noted.
- School records – records for children might give more information on their mother.

### **Court records**

- Contracts (Marriage, Land, Business)
- Adoptions - less likely to be closed before 1900
- Divorces & child support- more common than you think before 1900
- Other Civil cases (lawsuits often involve family members)
- Criminal Records & Prison records
- Probation & Parole reports

**Newspapers** Look for all known family members. Don't forget to search ethnic and church newspapers as well.

- Birth, marriage and death announcements
- Obituaries – pay close attention to those attending from out of town
- Gossip columns - family visitors
- Anniversaries
- Advertisements for probates, land, etc .

**Census Records** [include any known family members]

- Family might live with parents
- Elderly parents might live with family
- Other family members might live with family
- Who lives nearby?
  - Families close after marriage
  - Families close before marriage
  - Even before 1850 look for families with daughters the right age

**Land Records**

- Low cost sales from family members
- Maiden in Deed or Contract
- et ux - and spouse
- Plat maps/ block books to see adjacent families
- Progressions - putting a family plot back together

**Military Records**

- Service Records
- Pension Papers

**Organizations** – Look at husbands associations as well. Pay attention to sponsors.

- Sororities/ Fraternities
- Lineage Societies
- Heritage Societies

**Published sources** – Look for your direct ancestors and every other known relative.

- Family histories
- County histories, don't forget to look for any known relatives: children, husbands parents, known sisters
- Indexes
- Diaries and Journals of those who knew your ancestress

**Creative online searches** – Name, birth date, place. Use given names without surnames, use partial names, allow a range for dates and names. Search for known family members, etc.

## LDS Records

- a. Family Register - lists names of ancestors for whom people are searching and gives the name and address of the searcher. There are similar lists online
- b. The International Genealogical Index. The IGI is excellent for finding lost ladies and other information.

**Genealogical Query Columns** put you in touch with others who may have uncovered maiden names. Thousands of them are searchable online. Town historians and librarians receive genealogical inquiries. In New York State nearly every town has a volunteer town historian. Many of these people keep surname files

## A few more thoughts and notes

**The Same Name** – Don't rule out the obvious. The maiden name might be same as the married name.

**Naming Patterns** – Look for families with the right given names living in the area, mothers and fathers names passed on - 2nd son for wife's father, 1st daughter for wife's mother, middle names might be a family name.

**Lost Ancestors** – Did your female ancestor or perhaps her sister remarry and you don't know their new name? If they might have collected social security, you can search the SSDI using just a given name and a birth date. If the name isn't too common, you might then be able to investigate those deaths to see if they are possibly the right person. Hopefully a death certificate might give a maiden name.

**The changing surname** – Don't get stuck by looking for a surname listed on just one document. Often times names have been modified over time. Check every possible combination of names using all the clues you have. Don't give up because you were told it was so.

**Did your ancestor keep her maiden name?** This was not common in the United States, but there was a movement to do so starting in the 1850s. If you find your ancestor widowed and her name is different from that of her children, don't automatically assume that she remarried and was widowed again, she might have used her maiden name. Use of maiden names was more common in certain European and Latin American countries, so always investigate further.

**Create a Time Line** – Create a time line for your ancestor. Indicate any known vital records, and all events in the neighborhood that should be searched for further clues. Include information on spouse and children. Enter information for potential parents.

**Remember, if you haven't investigated every possible clue you aren't done!**