

Some Helpful Hints to Genealogists

The following are things to consider when researching people using census indexes or other sources. **NOTE:** Indexes are often incorrect. Verify with the source document/image when possible.

- Variations in spelling of surnames (Use of soundex, when available, can help here.)
Variations in the spelling of surnames can result from:
 - Illiteracy of, or spelling experimentation by, the name holder
 - Misspelling or phonetic spelling by census taker
 - Misreading of spelling by indexer
 - Etc.
- Variations in spelling or replacement of given names
Variations in the spelling of given names can result in much the same way as may occur with spellings of the surname. Added to these are uses of:
 - Initials only
 - Middle name substituted for or transposed with first name (especially probable if a Sr./Jr. relationship existed with either parent)
Example: For decades I lost track of the only full brother of one of my more recent ancestors and was, therefore, also oblivious to the brother's large family. As it turned out, the older brother, who happened to be a junior, used as his first name the previously unknown (by me) middle name shared with his father and continued doing so until after the father's death. Interestingly, the brothers often lived near each other, yet the presence of the one was obscured until I accidentally made the connection through a local history book in which both men were referenced.
 - Name derivative (e.g. Polly for Mary, Peggy for Margaret, Mattie for Martha, Sally for Sarah, Fanny for Anna, etc., ad infinitum)
 - Abbreviated first or middle name (e.g. Dan or Danl for Daniel, Ben or Benj. for Benjamin, Chas for Charles, Liz, Lizzy, Libby, Eliz, Eliza, Beth, Betsy or Betty for Elizabeth, Eb or Ebon for Ebenezer, etc.)
- Different spouse than expected
 - Death was common, potentially resulting in remarriage of the surviving spouse
 - Remarriage of a woman between census years could result in her being difficult to find, such as in the next census (unless at least the surname of the new husband is known)
 - A new spouse for a man could have the same given name as his former spouse, especially if there are common names like Elizabeth, Mary, Sarah, etc., creating possible confusion due to potentially different age, birth location, parents' birth location, maiden name, etc.
 - A spouse could have been married any number of times before, carrying along a string of former surnames that might or might not include the maiden name.
- Wrong age (too old, too young, unchanging between census years)
Age is one of the most likely aspects of a census to be incorrect or incorrectly indexed. Some possible causes:
 - Person providing material estimates
 - Person providing material doesn't want actual age known

- Census taker estimates
- Indexer misreads age/date
- Wrong location
 - People moved (and are still moving) around a lot, especially since the end of the Revolutionary War; be willing to expand the search area, if needed
 - 10 years between census-taking could equate to any number of moves by a person or family. Because of the destruction by fire of many 1890 census records, there may be a 20-year gap—between 1880 and 1900—for researchers to deal with.
 - People went where the jobs were. People who were farm laborers, like most of my ancestors prior to 1900, had to move frequently to follow the work. Families who moved frequently didn't get mentioned often in local history works, making tracking them that much more difficult.
- Focus on unusual names or unusual spellings of names when usual ones are difficult to find.
 - In some family lines people have a similar set of names, both helping and confusing tracking a particular family or person.
 - Names like William, Sarah, Elizabeth, Mary, John, James, Robert, etc., are very common, especially when coupled with Johnson, Smith, Jones, etc.
- People have disappeared throughout history, sometimes physically and sometimes due to lack of, or inadequate, records. Some of many possible reasons are:
 - Disease/death
 - Remarriage
 - Frequent relocation, made easier as means of transportation improved
 - Refusal to take part in the census process or somehow missed by a census-taker, or census information was collected but somehow destroyed or otherwise became unreadable
 - Shying away from participating in public activities and/or politics
 - Illiteracy resulting in any number of spellings of given and/or surname
 - Inaccurate indexing
 - Foul play
 - War
 - Settling someplace where civilization was slow to encroach
- Don't "adopt" an ancestral line or relative(s).
 - Look at all the facts surrounding a person and/or family to determine whether they are of the line you are researching.
 - Don't necessarily accept whole cloth another person's research information. They may be inaccurate or may have been led astray by accepting someone else's research information, and so on.

Example: A previously unknown (to me) distant cousin took me to task, via email, for connecting one of his ancestors to one of my family lines. He said that according to a commonly believed, trusted and accepted source among his fellow researchers/genealogists, his ancestor came from a totally different ancestral line. He and all of his fellow researchers following that line back in time had hit a brick wall and had all but given up on pursuing it further. It took a while before the overwhelming evidence I had already collected convinced him that the connection to my ancestral line was indeed correct. Using my proofs, he was then able to

convince other of his fellow researchers, via their online message board, to also change to the correct line.

- Occupations and circumstances might change between census years, but be wary of sudden or radical changes. That 50-year-old farm laborer living alone with net value of \$100 from the last census is probably not the 60-year-old attorney-at-law of the same name and locale, with net value of \$6,000 and a household of six people, appearing in the next census. Some additional research would be in order.
- Don't follow a single line of descent and ignore all others when siblings or other relatives of the subject(s) being researched are known.
 - Uncovering and recording information about siblings and relatives makes the overall picture richer.
 - Sometimes historical notation may be found for a sibling or other known relative that will shed light on the main person or line being researched.
 - Researching parallel lines may lead to a larger pool of living "cousins" willing to share information to the common good.

The following is a list of dates, locations, spouses, and occupations for my ancestor Riley Preston Page (my parents always just called "R. P.") that took research over *many* years to unravel. He is the best example I can present to validate several points of consideration listed above. Note the varying name spellings including use of initials, frequent and sometimes radical location changes, spousal changes, and variations in occupation. These were all for the same person. I had some similar problems with researching my ancestor Adam Frink Hubbart/Hubbard, but his changes in circumstances were not nearly as radical as those listed below.

(**Note:** Information for years ending in zero "0" came from census reports.)

- 1839—Birth, **Macedon, Wayne Co., NY**, according to Riley when he married Emma (Conant) Wright, or **Manchester, Ontario Co., NY**, according to his death certificate; parentage listed as **William H. Page** and **Chloe Thayer** when married to Emma, but as **Ebenezer Page** and **Mary (or May) Thayer** on death certificate
- 1840—(only head of household William H. Page named), Macedon, Wayne Co., NY
- 1850—Riley P. Page, **Webster, Monroe Co., NY** in school
- 1859—Riley P. Page married Elizabeth **Hollenbeck** or **Holenbek** at **Burr Oak, St. Joseph Co., MI** (**Hollemtuk** on marriage certificate but **Holenbek** when their daughter Carrie B. Page Richards Soule married Elmer Wheeler)
- 1860—Riley Page, **Matteson, Branch Co., MI** **farmer**
- 1870—**Reyley** Page, **Batavia, Branch Co., MI** farm laborer
- 1873—Riley P. Page married Sarah M. Keyes at **Charlotte, Eaton Co., MI**, **agent**
- 1880—Riley P. Page, Charlotte, Eaton Co., MI **traveling salesman (sewing machines)**
- 1900—Riley P. Page, **Webster, Monroe Co., NY** **shoe maker**
- 1905—**R. Preston** Page married Emma (Conant) Wright at Webster, Monroe Co., NY, shoe maker
- 1910—Riley P. Page, **Ontario, Wayne Co., NY** shoe maker
- 1920—Riley Page, **East Rochester, Monroe Co., NY** **none**
- 1928—Death East Rochester, Monroe Co., NY, burial somewhere in **Ontario, Wayne Co., NY**—exact burial location yet to be discovered

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