Genealogy Basics

1. **Find out everything you can from your parents, grandparents and other relatives.** Be patient—take time for them to finish their stories before asking another question. Stories have clues to your family's history. Be sensitive to emotions that are connected to the facts—it can be hard for people to talk about certain experiences. Share some of your stories in a way that makes a connection.

2. **Write down information and document your sources.**   Free forms are available online at http://www.familytreemagazine.com/freeforms or you can use genealogy software (find reviews at http://genealogy-software-review.toptenreviews.com/). You can also create a tree online if you create an account at genealogy websites like www.Ancestry.com (subscription) or www.FamilySearch.org (free).   Start with yourself and work backwards.

3. **Learn more about the history of the areas where your ancestors lived**, to make sense of their choices. Which countries are nearby, what war or other event may have caused them to move, or was there bad weather which caused crop failure? Check at libraries, historical societies or archives in the area, either in person or on their website under "Family History", "Genealogy" or "Research". Many have links to digitized local history. For Appleton Public Library the starting point would be http://www.apl.org/e/apl.

4. **Read** how-to books (generally at 929.4) or genealogy magazines from the library; subscribe to a genealogy blog like https://blog.eogn.com/ or attend webinars or programs to learn more. The Appleton Public Library has genealogy speakers from November to April; check the Events Calendar at http://host6.evanced.info/appleton/evanced/eventcalendar.asp.

5. **Keep checking back** at online sites! New records are constantly being added.

6. **Share information** with your family and other researchers. Get them interested by showing a photo and telling a story about it at family events, but keep it short.

7. **Back up your findings regularly!** Save copies in multiple formats and locations--cloud storage, place a copy in your safety deposit box, and share with a family member.

Location searches:

When searching by location, look at the **dropdown** list. Many searches provide a list of locations using the name of the city, then county, then state. For example, if you put in Appleton, Wisconsin, it may not match their listing of "Appleton, Outagamie County, Wisconsin". Choose location names from the dropdown menu by clicking on them.

Boundaries changed over time, whether in a country or in a state. Appleton is today in Outagamie County, but Outagamie was formed from Brown County. States formed out of territories. Europe, especially, changed boundaries a lot. As that happened, the names of towns changed as well. Look for historical atlases, gazetteers, or books about that country's history. The records you need may be in a city you hadn't considered.
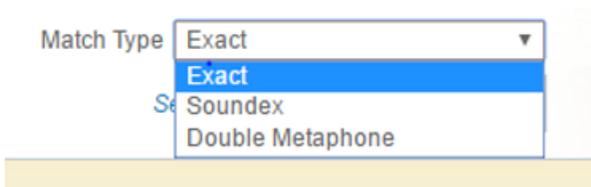
If you don't find someone where you thought they lived, **widen the search** by moving from city to county level and then to the state. Sometimes you will get a better result by using only their name and the state or country, as records will be found where the person attended church or the nearest courthouse, which wasn't necessarily the one in their official area of residence.

Name Searches

 A **given** or **"Christian"** name is a person's first name, like George. A **surname** or **family** name is their last name, like Washington. The last name may include prefix, such as "Van den Bosch", which could signify where the family came from, or from which level of society.

There are surname sites and blogs, where people who are related to a certain family post information. They may also have a Facebook site. Forums on genealogy sites may allow you to post requests for information.

For more information on names, check the links at http://cyndislists.com/names/general.

Exact matches are those where you are searching for a name or word in a record, which is spelled exactly how you typed it.

Remember that the individual may have spelled their name in different ways: Friedrich/Frederick, or just used an initial, so try multiple forms in your search.

Soundex

Used by the U.S. government to organize census records, the Soundex system allows you to use one search for multiple spellings or names that have a similar sound.

This system ignores vowels plus the letters "h", "w", and "y", unless a vowel is the first letter in the word.   Similar sounds are represented by numbers, as shown in the chart. The first letter in the word is retained, and the rest of the consonants receive a number until there are 3.
If it is a short name with only one or two consonants, "0" is added to make a three-digit code. For example, "Lee" would be L000. Double letters and letters with the same number are ignored if they are next to each other. Last names with prefixes may be coded with or without the prefix, so check both.

There is a **Soundex calculator** at http://www.eogn.com/soundex/ where you simply type in the last name. A full explanation is found at http://www.archives.gov/publications/general-info-leaflets/55-census.html . There are other systems to code names such as the **Double Metaphone**. Learn more at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metaphone.

Soundex Coding Guide

Number	Represents the Letters
1	B, F, P, V
2	C, G, J, K, Q, S, X, Z
3	D, T
4	L
5	M, N
6	R

Disregard the letters A, E, I, O, U, H, W, and Y.

Examples:

Lee = L000

Johnson = J525

Pizarro = P260

VanDeusen = V532 OR D250

Washington = W252

In some cultures and time periods, people had **Baptismal names** which were rarely used. For example Carl Otto Friedrich Schultz probably never used "Carl" and "Otto" as they were baptismal names. He would go by "Friedrich" or his nickname "Fritz". Carl and Otto may have been the names of his grandfathers, so use this as a clue.

A **patronymic** name is a last name created from the first name of the father or other male ancestor. Hans's son would have the last name "Hanson" and his daughter "Hansdottir", for example.

Diminutives or **nicknames** are taken from the full name. Some are easy to understand, like "Dave" for David, but in past times Margaret could have been called "Polly" or "Peg" while now she might be "Meg" or "Maggie".   There are quite a few lists on the web if you use the keywords "genealogy" and "nicknames" to search.

Names may be spelled differently even among the same family, so try some variations. Use a **wildcard search** if allowed, by placing an asterisk after the beginning of the word. The search "joh*" would bring up John, Johannes, or Johanna as a first name; and Johnson or Johnston as a last name.

Many people used their full name including middle name on some documents, and only their first and last names on others. Still others may have only their initials and a last name. Be sure you try several **variations**.

Record Types

- **Vital records** are marriage, birth and death records. They will be found in government archives, both at the county and state level. In Wisconsin they can be found at the County Courthouse in the Register of Deeds office, of the county where the event took place. Many have been digitized.
- **Church records** were sometimes used as official records. They include baptism, confirmation, marriage and burial records. In some areas and time periods they may also include records of when families moved in or out of the parish.
- **Census records** have been kept by many countries. In the U.S. Federal Censuses are taken every 10 years starting in the 1800s (1850, 1860, 1870, etc.) and state censuses may have been taken periodically as well. Most of the 1890 Federal Census was destroyed in a fire, but a few sections remain. There is a time limit for when they can be released, so 1940 is the most recent census that can be searched. These are online at major genealogy sites, where you will usually be able to see the digitized image.
- **Military records** are kept by the federal government, veterans organizations such as the Wisconsin Veterans Museum http://www.wisvetsmuseum.com/ and sometimes in museums or other archives. **Pension records** may contain a lot of personal information needed to justify the pension request such as service, personal relationships, and injuries suffered during the war.
- **Cemetery records and funeral home records** will help you find where your ancestor is buried, who paid for the lot or the funeral and who they were buried next to. Those nearby plots might also be family! Gravestones show dates of birth and death or age; sometimes relationships. Try Billion Graves or Find A Grave—both are free sites.

- **City or county directories** are invaluable for finding the house your family lived in, businesses they may have owned or worked for, and ads for those businesses. If they were part of local government or sometimes other organizations such as fraternal societies they may also be listed. http://www.apl.org/community/digital has links to three locations which have digitized copies of older Appleton and area directories.
- **Local histories.** In Appleton, the major one is Ryan's History of Outagamie County, which was published around 1911. It is available online at http://www.foxvalleymemory.org/Ryans/indextext.html.
- **Land records** include military bounty lands, original land patents from the government, Grantee/Grantor records, deeds, plat books and more. Official records are found at the county and state level in Wisconsin, as well as at the Federal level.   Survey books and early land records for Wisconsin are found at the Board of Commissioners of Public Lands http://bcpl.wisconsin.gov/category.asp?linkcatid=2824&linkid=1440&locid=145; Federal land records at the Bureau of Land Mangement https://www.glorecords.blm.gov/ . There are many other sites as well.
- **School records** include attendance lists and school yearbooks. Records may be found at a current school district office, at local archives or at Area Research Centers.
- **Immigration records.** While most people think of Ellis Island as the place their ancestors might have first set foot on American soil, there are many other ports where they might have landed, such as Philadelphia, Boston, Baltimore, New Orleans, and San Francisco. Some came through Canada, having landed at Halifax or St. John.
  - Castle Garden was a gateway for immigrants before Ellis Island. Check here to search those and pre-Castle Garden records: http://stevemorse.org/ellis/cg.html.
  - Ellis Island records can be searched here http://www.libertyellisfoundation.org/passenger
  - Immigrant Ship Transcribers Guild has typed up transcripts of passengers on ships from around the world. If you know where they departed from or where they landed and an approximate date you may be able to find your ancestors names.
- **Naturalization records.** In the US the main governmental source is the National Archives though some records are available through large databases. Many people did not finish the process. The rules changed over time. Here are some of the basics. https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Naturalization_and_Citizenship . http://www.naturalizationrecords.com/index.shtml includes images of document examples.

Stuck? Try these strategies:

- Research other family members, like brothers & sisters, or neighbors from the original location. Many times they moved to the same area, but not always at the same time.
- Check with local historical societies—someone from the local town may have done research on the family.
- Go back and search again using lots of spellings for your ancestor's last name. Try just initials or no first name.
- Make a timeline—what parts of their life are you missing? What records might fill in that area?
- Look at the history of that time period—was there a big rush of immigration? An epidemic where a lot of people died? A war? All these things could cause a gap in your ancestor's records. What kind of records might exist?
- Do a Google Search—you may find a digitized local history or newspaper article on Google Books.
- Look at online map sites with historic maps:
    - UK https://www.old-maps.co.uk/#/
    - World http://www.oldmapsonline.org/
    - World http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/map_sites/hist_sites.html
    - US Topographical http://historicalmaps.arcgis.com/usgs/
- Search online or microfilmed newspapers. Appleton Public Library has several sources: the Appleton newspapers on microfilm, NewspaperArchive (electronic), EBSCOhost, etc. Check with library staff for more information.