



Getting the Most Out of FamilySearch.org

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With over 8 billion names in searchable databases (for free) the FamilySearch website is typically one of the first sites visited by individuals when they begin their research. Many, however, never get past the Search tab, and never fully understand the results they get. Although available to anyone, the FamilySearch website is provided by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) and its primary purpose is to assist church members with their temple work.

FamilySearch Evolution (From CD to Internet)

Over the years, the focus of FamilySearch has changed. The original FamilySearch contained searchable records including the IGI (International Genealogical Index), Ancestral File, Social Security Death Index, Military Records, Scottish Records and the Family History Catalog, on about 50 CD's. The Internet version, released in May of 1999, has undergone constant change. Today the focus is on sharing information including photos and stories through the Family Tree. In 2010 FamilySearch began the process of digitizing 2.4 million rolls of microfilm (containing 6.875 billion images) stored in their Granite Mountain Record Vault in Utah. In addition to the historical microfilms, teams of missionaries continue to visit archives around the world to add to the collections of digitized records. Each month about 35 million additional images and indexed entries are added to the site. The [FamilySearch Indexing](#) project allows anyone with a computer to index records at home in their own time. It's easy and anyone who uses the records of FamilySearch should invest some time to help. The more people who index, the faster we'll see the records online! You can choose the type of records you would like to index (I worked on the Irish Civil Registration Indexes) and those records that have been completed are available at FamilySearch.org. Digitization is occurring much more quickly than the indexing of records so there are large collections of browse only images online.

Current Resources in FamilySearch.org

All research begins with a question...who are you searching, when did they live, where did they live, and what else do you know about them (to separate them from others of the same name). You will likely begin, therefore, by searching for information on one of your ancestors. From the home page, select "Search" then "Records." You will be presented with the main search page. The tendency is to begin by typing a name into the search boxes on the left, but DON'T. The results will likely be hundreds or possibly thousands of records. If your research question is to find a marriage in Florida after 1930, click on the map to the right for the US, then select Florida and look at the list of databases. Is there one which will likely answer your question? Select that database and before you search, read "Learn More." This will explain what is included in the database and any known issues. Is the database taken from historical records, or is it a compilation of secondary sources? Once you understand the contents, search the specific database for your ancestor. When you look at the list of databases, notice the camera icon on the left. The icon indicates that there are images associated with the database. If there is a box behind the image of

the camera, it means that the images can only be viewed at the Family History Library or a local Family History Center.

Viewing the individual results provides the information that was captured during the indexing process, including the complete source citation. From this page you can also view the image (if attached), which may contain additional information to assist in your search. You can then, *Copy*, *Print*, *Attach* the record to the individual in your Family Tree, *Add to your Sources* or *Share* the information via email or Social Media. If there is an image (there will be a picture of a camera next to the index entry) you can *Download* and save the image to your personal database.

But don't stop there. Continue to scroll down to view the Image-Only Historical Records. Is there a Collection that might answer your question? Remember rule number one of the [Genealogical Proof Standard](#)...an exhaustive search. Using these records is just like using microfilm. Frequently there is an index at the beginning of a volume, and in some cases there are what FamilySearch refers to as "waypoints." Although the records haven't yet been indexed, they may have been broken down to states or counties to help move through the collection.

Want more records? Continue to scroll down to find additional records from the FamilySearch Catalog for your requested location.

Note that under the **Search** menu, there are addition options. In addition to **Records**, you can also search the **FamilyTree**, **Genealogies**, the **Catalog**, **Books** or the **Wiki**.

When searching the **Catalog** search for the locality rather than your ancestors' name. You might also have gotten to the Catalog by scrolling down on your locality search as mentioned above. Your results will include a list of microfilms, microfiche and books available at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City. The Library is no longer providing microfilms and fiche out to local Family History Centers, but many of the films have been digitized. Even if the have not been indexed, you can browse them just like you would browse microfilm. Because of licensing requirements, some images can only be viewed at a local Family History Center. If the books have been digitized, you will be able to view a copy online. The Family History Library does not loan books, but check [WorldCat.org](#) to find a copy that might be available through InterLibrary Loan.

Searching **Genealogies** will bring up results from the older International Genealogical Index (IGI), the Pedigree Resource File or Ancestral File. These results are from submitted genealogies and like Ancestry Trees, should be used only as a hint to other records. Many of these entries have been incorporated into **FamilySearch Family Tree** which is more likely to have a source citation.

One of the most valuable (and unfortunately least used) resources at FamilySearch is the **Wiki**. Here you will find a wealth of information to assist you with your research. Let's say you've discovered your ancestor came from Pennsylvania. Search for Pennsylvania to discover what records are available, unique genealogical sources, when vital records began and the development of the counties. For example, if your ancestor was from Fayette County in SW Pennsylvania, the area was part of Lancaster County until 1750 when it became Cumberland County; in 1771 it was part of Bedford and in 1873 of Westmoreland. It became Fayette County in 1883. If your ancestors were there prior to 1883, you need to look for records in the previous counties.

The **Learning Center** under the "Help" menu in the upper right corner provides free classes on topics ranging from getting started to ethic resources to DNA. As genealogists we are always in a

learning mode and this is an excellent place to continue your education. In the Bibliography I've listed a YouTube Webinar on "[Finding Elusive Records in FamilySearch](#)." I highly recommend it!

There is a heavy emphasis around adding your information to the **Family Tree** including photos, stories and audio recordings. (As always, you need to read the terms and conditions. Definitely read Judy Russell's article listed in the Bibliography titled "[FamilySearch: sharing is forever](#)."

The Family Tree at FamilySearch is different from other online trees as it is one tree for everyone. When adding your information to the tree, you need to first check to see if the individual is already there. You can then connect that person to your family, adding any new information, documents, sources, etc. For those who already have a substantial database, either on their computer, or in an online tree elsewhere, the process of moving your information to Family Tree is not that easy. My experience has been that moving information via GEDCOM provides limited results and requires tedious matching to information that might already be in the Family Tree. This process, I'm sure, will improve over time and my long term goal would be to get all of my research into the Family Tree for preservation. In the Bibliography I have included a link to a [Quick Start Guide](#) created by the Burley Idaho Family History Center. You can also go to the Learning Center and look for lessons on "Family Tree." Both Legacy Family Tree and RootsMagic software have the ability to connect with the FamilySearch Tree and I have also included links to their training materials.

*REMEMBER: The information you obtain on FamilySearch.org (or any other Internet site unless linked to a digitized original record) is a DERIVATIVE source and SECONDARY information. You MUST go to the original! And don't forget to
CITE YOUR SOURCES!!!*

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