Making Better Use of Ancestry.com

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A few resources:

- Become a Master Searcher on Ancestry – Anne Gillespie Mitchell
- https://www.rootstech.org/videos/anne-mitchell
- How to Build a Genealogy Research Plan – Amy Johnson Crow
- http://www.amyjohnsoncrow.com/2016/02/19/how-to-build-a-genealogy-research-plan/
- Ancestry.com Wiki
- https://www.ancestry.com/wiki/index.php?title=Main_Page
- Free Ancestry Subscription for LDS Church Members
- https://familysearch.org/partneraccess

Ancestry.com - a powerful, dynamic website that is one of the best tools we have in our genealogy toolbox. Getting the most out of that resource depends on our understanding of the website and our search skills.

In this class we will cover:

- Website Tour
- More Effective Searching
- Understanding the Collections
- A Few Hidden Gems

Website Tour of the Home Page:

- **The top toolbar** – We'll come back to this.
- **Banner ad** – Right now it's an ad for an Ancestry DNA sale - $69 per kit.
- **Recent Member Connect Activity** – This will list activity of other members you have connected with or members who have the same people in their trees.
- **Recent Family Tree Activity** – This will show my tree or one of my trees that I have most recently worked in with the most recent changes and links to different parts of that tree.
- **Basic Search Tool** – This can get you into a basic search. I don't generally search from here but it will just take you into a search that you can then edit.
- **What's Happening at Ancestry** – This section will show recent collections that have been added or updated and other new stuff.
- **My Shoebox** – Your shoebox is filled with items you add to it. If you find a record that you think might be about someone in your tree but you can't prove it, you can add it to your shoebox so you don't lose track of it. I am very selective about what I put in my shoebox because I don't want a super long list of records I don't know what to do with.
- **Products and Services** – These are listed on the right and can be explored easily enough.
- **Follow Us Buttons** – These are at the very bottom. You can follow Ancestry on pretty much every type of social media platform.

Home Page Top Toolbar, starting at the right and working left:

• **Member Name drop down** – This list contains your member profile and other account settings. Take a minute and explore each one. Spend a little time with your profile page. If you want to connect with cousins who may help further your research, make your profile inviting. Add a friendly photo, add a few details. You don't have to be super specific here and give away lots of personal information, but share enough so that your profile is inviting to your distant cousins. They are much more likely to message someone with a friendly profile.

• **Messages** – Check your messages! And, respond to your messages! You will make cousin connections that will
add amazing info, photos, stories, artifacts (well, photos of artifacts) to your family history.

• **Hint Leaf** – This hint drop down will show you just a handful of recent hints in your tree(s). There are other places to view a comprehensive list of hints. But please, please, please don't let hints drive your research. Hints are a tool in the hand of a genealogist, they should not be the driver.

• **Hire a Researcher** – Pretty straightforward. I have never hired an Ancestry researcher.

• **Extras** – This list includes: iOS & Android apps, Photo Books & Posters, ProGenealogists (hire a researcher again), Ancestry Academy, and Gift Subscriptions. I will just mention two things. The books you can create from your Ancestry tree are beautiful. Ancestry Academy is full of excellent instructional videos to help you learn about different places, record types, search strategies, etc.

• **Help** – This list includes: Support Center, Community, Message Boards, and once again – Hire an Expert. Those message boards can contain gold.

• **DNA** – This drop down is where you would access your DNA results and work with that data.

• **Search** – The most important drop down menu on the website. We'll cover this in detail.

• **Trees** – This list contains any trees you have created (but if you have a lot it will only show a certain number in this list sorted by frequency of use) and two additional options – Create & Manage Trees and Import tree from FamilySearch. You can create a tree from scratch, upload a gedcom file, or import four generations from FamilySearch.

• **Home** – This will take you to the Home Page.

More Effective Searching:

In order to search Ancestry.com more effectively it's important to understand what information is available and how to access it by altering search terms and applying filters.

The Search drop down:

• **All collections** – This takes you to the main search page.

• **Census & Voter Lists** – This page allows you to search only census records. You can search by collection – i.e. US Census, UK Census, or by decade – 1900s, 1880s etc.

• **Birth, Marriage, & Death** – Exactly what it sounds like.

• **Immigration & Travel** – Again, just what it sounds like.

• **Public Member Trees** – Search through member trees that are public. Note – you can also search private trees. The results will tell you that a tree exists that matches or closely matches the person you are looking for. You can then message the private tree holder and ask them questions. I am a private tree holder and I always respond and help.

• **Military** – Search all military records or search by specific conflict.

• **Card Catalog** – You can search by Title or Keyword or a combination of both. You can use the filters to show you what you want to find. You can sort the results different ways including by newly added or updated.

• **Member Directory** – This can help you find a specific Ancestry.com member.

The main search page has several parts:

• **Search Tool** – This tool allow you to input different pieces of information and set some filters.

• **Recent Searches** – The website stores my four most recent searches for me. I can click on one of them to take me back to that exact search.

• **Explore By Location** – This is a visual entry into the card catalog. You are looking at a map of the US. You can click on any state and be taken to a list of collections specific to that state. Along the top are other choices: UK & Ireland, Europe, Canada, Australia & NZ. Clicking on one of those choices will change the map and then you can choose a portion of the map.

• **Recently Viewed Collections** – This is on the top right. This little sweet spot is one of my favorites. It lists the last three collections you have viewed. So if you regularly search in the same collection this is a fast way to get there. Click Search and then All Collections and you will see the list right away.

• **Special Collections** – This is a long list on the right side of the page with many options. Take a minute and Explore.

Altering Search Terms & Filters To Get Exactly What You Want:

Begin your search with the person's name, birth year, and birthplace. Look at the total number of results to get a feel for how common the name is for that place and time. Now start using the filters.

There are filters for the search terms you entered and for the various collections. Start by altering the filters on the search terms. Spend a little time exploring with those slider bars to the right of your search terms. Slide the bars slowly and read the setting of each "stop" on the slider bar. Become familiar with each of those settings. The closer you move the sliders to exact, the more you will limit your results.

You can also filter the collections you are searching in. For instance, if the person you are searching for only lived in the UK, use the collections dropdown filter to say "UK & Ireland". You can also limit your results to specific categories like "Census & Voter Lists". From there you can limit it by decade and then by a specific collection like "1910 US Federal Census".

Using a combination of filters in both your search terms and the collections will greatly reduce and refine your results. If you are being an effective searcher you should be getting back very small batches of results. Remember – search with a specific record in mind and tailor your search to reflect that. Use what you know to help you.

If I want to find the marriage record for my great grandparents and I know they were married before the 1920 census and that great grandma was only 16 in 1920, I can make a good guess that she was married just before the census was taken. So likely she was married in 1919 or 1920 in the same place she was living during the census. I also know that the indexes to marriage records don't always contain birth information. So I will tailor my search to reflect all of this information. My search terms will look like this, with these filters:

First Name: Mary Brown (exact & similar)   Last Name: Young Costello (exact & similar)
Born: 1903 (broad)   In: Scotland (broad)
Married: 1920 (+/- 1 years)   In: Washington, USA (exact)

These terms bring me only 6 results and the top choice is the correct one. I used what I already knew to tell the website exactly what I wanted to find and it listened to my instructions and brought me back excellent results. But what if my guess at a Washington marriage was wrong? I could change the filter to "state and adjacent states". Maybe they went over a county line into another state to get married. If I still don't find what I want, I can keep altering those filters. If that still doesn't give me the record I am seeking, I may want to make a guess at a record collection. In this case I would be looking for marriages in Washington State that include the time period 1919-1920. I can check Ancestry's catalog to make sure they have a collection that matches what I'm looking for. Ancestry has a lot of records but they don't have everything.

If you are getting a bunch of the same item type in your returns and it's something you don't want to see right now you can turn that type of collection off in the edit search box. Click edit search, scroll to the bottom and uncheck the collection that is bogging down your results. For instance, when I search my great grandmother I get a big, long list of photos I have added. I don't need to see those so I can uncheck "photos & maps" to pull them out of my search results.

Remember – Tailor your search terms and filters to help you find <u>the specific item</u> you are looking for.

General searches = General list. That list is usually very long. There are probably really great things buried in that long list. A general search isn't bad, in fact it can pull up things you didn't know to go looking for. But if you only ever use a general search, you will miss out on a lot of great stuff. Use those filters and use the relationships in your family member's life to help you get creative in your search terms.

<u>Understanding the Collections:</u>
• Explore the main search page and the card catalog.
• Look to see what collections exist for the place and time you are searching.

<u>A Few Hidden Gems:</u>
• **Newspapers** – This collection is small but newspapers are great and if you get lucky enough to find some newspapers for your family on here you will be glad.
• **Books** – Lots and lots of books. This is one of the most underutilized parts of the website.
• **County Histories and the like** – Okay, so these are just books. But did I mention the books?? Give them a look.
• **City Directories** – Use these to create a timeline to help you fill in the gaps for an ancestor. Use the filters so you only see city directory results.
• **Ancestry Wiki** – The link is at the top of this handout. The wiki is a wealth of information. Learn about the places you are researching. When did they start civil registration? What churches were in the area and where are those records held? Did the courthouse burn? If so, there will be suggestions for finding other types of information.

Ancestry Trees

I am a big fan of Ancestry trees for so many reasons. During the next class period I will discuss Ancestry Trees in detail and explain how to use the "FamilySearch" button to easily send information between FS and Ancestry.

A few extra tips:

• MANY records have additional pages – when viewing an image, ALWAYS click to the next page, and again and again if the record is still about your person. Keep on clicking until you see a record about someone else. The most common is a two page record. However, I once found a record that had 127 pages. The index does not usually indicate additional pages, so always click to the next page.
• Ancestry allows multiple last names in the last name box. Throw in the maiden and married surnames of your female relatives.
• When you type in a place on Ancestry.com you will see a list of possible results that changes as you type in a drop down menu. Always take their place name suggestion. Their place names are standardized and will bring back better search results. You can choose a broad standardized place name like "Utah, USA" or a more specific place name like "Mapleton, Utah, Utah, USA".

"Like partaking of the sacrament, attending meetings, reading the scriptures, and saying personal prayers, doing family history and temple work should be a regular part of our personal worship. The response of our youth and others to prophetic invitations has been inspiring and proves this work can and should be done by *all* members at *any* age.

As Elder Quentin L. Cook explained, **"We [now] have the doctrine, the temples, and the technology."** Doing the work now is much easier and limited only by the number of members who make this a priority. The work still takes time and sacrifice, but all can do it, and with relative ease compared to just a few years ago.

To assist members, the Church has gathered records and provided tools so that much of the work can be done in our own homes or in the ward buildings and the temple. Most obstacles have been removed. Whatever your past perception, it is different now!"

- Elder Allan F. Packer, "The Book", October 2014 General Conference