



Livermore-Amador Genealogical Society Presents

~ Gena Ortega-Philibert

You Are Invited

WHEN: Monday, July 8th, 2019
7:00 – 9:00 p.m.*

***Note: Start time is earlier than usual!**

WHERE: Congregation Beth Emek
3400 Nevada Court, Pleasanton

COST: No Charge - Visitors welcome



Her Name was Not Unknown: Finding Female Ancestors

“What’s her maiden name?” “What happened to her after her husband died?” “How do I start researching my great-grandmother?” This presentation will explain techniques, methodology, and resources vital to family history research. Enhance your research skills using a 5-step approach to researching (and finding) female ancestors.

We’re Related to George Washington?: Proving (or Disproving) Family Stories

I have them and you have them. In fact, we all have them, that story about our family’s brush with greatness. Maybe you’re related to Jesse James, or your ancestor was on the Titanic, or you’re descended from three brothers who came to America. But is it true? Learn the methodology for proving or disproving that family story.

Gena Ortega-Philibert is an author and instructor whose focus is genealogy, social and women's history. She holds Master’s degrees in Psychology, Women's Studies and Religion. Her published works include three books, numerous articles published in magazines and online, & *Tracing Female Ancestors* (Moorshead Publishing). She has been featured at the National Genealogical Society Conference, the Legacy Family Tree Webinar series, and on the PBS series *Genealogy Roadshow* and the Travel Channel’s *Follow Your Past*.

Her Name Was Not Unknown: Researching Your Female Ancestor's Life

Gena Philibert-Ortega, MA²

Women are half the population but they seem to be the hardest half to find in a family tree. I don't know about you but I want to scream when I find a female ancestor's gravestone that identifies her as Mrs. John Smith or when her children's birth certificates label her name as "unknown." What can you do to find your female ancestor? Thinking outside the proverbial genealogy box will assist you in finding clues to her life. The following are just some of the techniques you should consider incorporating into your research plan.

Research Involves Five Aspects of a Woman's Life:

- The woman herself
- The woman's family
- Locality where she lived
- The time period she lived in
- Her neighbors and community

As you research, consider how to search for resources that document these five aspects.

Make a Timeline

Whenever you start researching an ancestor, it's always a good idea to begin a timeline. The timeline serves as a visual representation of your ancestor's life. This can help you analyze your findings and to see if there are any missing pieces. It also can serve as a research log reminding you what you have already found.

Check the Usual Sources

As with any research, start with sources you are most comfortable and familiar with. Find your female ancestor in records such as the census which places her in a specific time and location. Look for vital records, if applicable. Check cemetery websites like **FindAGrave** < <http://www.findagrave.com/>> and **Interment.net** < <http://interment.net/>> for her burial place. Conduct searches on genealogy websites such as **Ancestry.com** and **FamilySearch**.

As you search these familiar websites, make sure to keep an Internet research log where you note the date, name variations you searched, and databases. Make sure to use name variations

including initials and creative spellings for your ancestor. A computer search engine will only bring back results based on what you have entered so it's important to conduct multiple searches.

Create a List of Keywords

As you search, remember that your ancestor may have been mentioned in records using numerous name variations. An example:

- Maude Sarah Snider
- M.S. Snider
- Maude S. Snider
- M. Sarah Snider
- Mrs. John Snider
- Mrs. J. A. Snider

Then you have to consider the various creative spellings of her first and last names. Create a list of all these variations. Then create a keyword list to use in archival and library catalogs and search engines. This list should include the place/s your ancestor lived in, their religion, occupation, and groups they belonged to.

Utilize Search Engines

So many resources exist online that it's impossible to know about every resource that can help you. That's where a generalized search on Google can assist you. By using quotes around the ancestor's name, like "Maude S. Snider" you are essentially telling Google to search for that phrase intact. Otherwise a search for Maude S. Snider without the quotes can bring back all kinds of results that contain those words somewhere on the web page but not necessarily together. While using an exact phrase search is a great technique, remember that it won't find variations of your ancestor's name. Use advanced search features to narrow your search even further.

Survey the Library

It's important to survey resources that may help you find additional information. To do this, you will need to look through the catalogs of various libraries. State libraries, academic libraries, private and public libraries all have something to offer genealogists. Start your search with **WorldCat.org**, a card catalog of items from thousands of libraries worldwide. Use keywords such as the name of your ancestor's hometown or county to begin your search. WorldCat searches not just books but also archival and image collections. While not every library is represented in WorldCat, it's a good place to begin your search. Once you have completed that search, move onto other library catalogs. I always search through the catalog of my local library, genealogy libraries, the public and state library where my ancestor lived, and nearby academic libraries.

Digitized Books

After you have looked at what resources can be found at the library, seek out digitized book websites for histories of the place your ancestress was from, as well as genealogically related books like city directories, to find mentions of that ancestor. Digitized book websites include **Google Books** < <http://books.google.com/>> **Internet Archive** < <http://archive.org/index.php>>, **Hathi Trust** < <http://www.hathitrust.org>> and **FamilySearch**.

Use Familiar Sources Differently

How do you use FamilySearch <www.familysearch.org>? Each research project should find you searching the **FamilySearch Catalog** for pertinent resources. The Catalog allows you to search by author, title, place, surname and keyword. Start with searching the catalog for resources for the place/s your ancestor resided. Once you have noted all the resources available for the place, conduct a keyword search. A keyword search is similar to how you would search an online search engine like Google. Use a word or short phrase to describe your subject. So for example I may choose the phrases “Colonial women” or “Quaker women” to describe an ancestor. Keywords don’t always find everything you would be interested in so it might be a good idea to come up with several different words or phrases to use in your search. As you consider keywords to use, choose words that describe the church or organization your ancestor belonged to. Don’t use too many words at once, the more words you include the less likely you will find matches.

Read the Newspapers

Ordinary people were mentioned in the newspaper for all kinds of reasons including milestone events like births and anniversaries, community events at churches and schools, even not so pleasant events like arrests, past due taxes and welfare payments. Newspapers can be found online and on microfilm. For digitized newspapers online see **GenealogyBank**, **Ancestry.com**, **Newspapers.com**, **Chronicling America** < <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>> and **Findmypast**.

Consider Her Life

What types of activities could your female ancestor have taken part in? Was she a member of a church? Did she join a women’s club? Was she a member of a fraternal organization? Learning more about the time period and place she lived in can provide important clues to what records documented her life. Groups recorded their activities whether by creating membership lists, histories, meeting notes, or treasurer’s reports.

When researching the organizations she may have belonged to, consider searching **city directories** and **local histories** for the names of membership groups. Organizational records can be archived within the organization itself, if it still exists, or in a manuscript collection housed at a library, archive or museum. Catalogs to search include **ArchiveGrid** <<http://beta.worldcat.org/archivegrid/>>.

Take a Look at Other Family Members

When researching a female ancestor it's vital to take a look at the men in her life. As you go further back year wise in your research, spend some time focusing on the family unit instead of solely on an individual. Focusing on a family can provide you with more options and information. Reconstructing that family may also reveal associates who migrated and interacted with the family. It is through these men that you might fill in the details of a woman's life. Mentions in military pensions, a will, or probate records can provide valuable clues. Start with a timeline for her husband's and/or father's life. Then identify documents that they should appear in.

Enlist the Help of Others

Have you tweeted your genealogy? What about posting an ancestral photo on **Facebook**? No? Consider social networking as one way to get the word out about your family history and find potential cousins. Whether you are tweeting a question on **Twitter**, posting photos to be identified on Facebook, or using a genealogy message board to ask questions, social networking can help you reach other researchers working on your mutual ancestors. Check out the **Genealogy on Facebook List** to identify applicable groups <<https://socialmediagenealogy.com/genealogy-on-facebook-list/>>.

Bibliography

Schaefer, Christina K. *The Hidden Half of the Family: A Sourcebook for Women's Genealogy*. Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Pub. Co, 2006.

Gena's Genealogy (Women's History Month): <http://philibertfamily.blogspot.com/>

Tracing Your Female Ancestors (Vol 1 & 2): <https://your-genealogy-history-store-usa.myshopify.com/collections/tracing-your-ancestors-series>

We're Related to George Washington?: Proving Family Stories **Gena Philibert-Ortega, MA²**

Some researchers have a suspected family member that gained notoriety or fame at some point in their life. Likewise, a family story or legend may tell of a family member that is connected to a famous person either by being a direct descendent or having met the person in some capacity. In some cases these stories are easily confirmed or denied other times it may require much more sleuthing.

If your ancestor was famous, infamous, or a black sheep there are ways to research their lives that will help you uncover the truth.

How do you prove (or disprove) these family stories? I have three suggestions:

1. **Research the person in question**, your ancestor. Develop a timeline for their life. Ask yourself: could this story be true? Is it probable? Is it the right time period? Was your ancestor in the right place? Who told you this story? How did they hear the story?

2. **Research the famous/infamous person**. The good thing about famous/infamous people is that they leave behind a paper trail. Check out books by historians and bibliographers. See if there are any archival collections with information about them. Check out the newspapers of the day and remember that a famous person isn't just written up in their local regional paper but in newspapers all over the country. Do some genealogy on the famous person that can help to narrow information linking your family with the famous person.

Some sources to search:

- **Newspapers**. Remember that aside from online copies, newspapers might also be available via microfilm.
- **Manuscript Collections**. Find by searching library and archive catalogs including ArchiveGrid. These collections include unpublished materials that range from journals to business records and correspondence.
- **Images**. Might be available although an online digital archive or through a museum or library.
- **Correspondence**. Neighbors, ministers, community members and family members may have written about the person before, during, and after they were infamous. That's where using ArchiveGrid, PERSI, or a university manuscript collection can be helpful.

- **Legal Records.** Depending on the person this could include court records, jail records, etc. Don't forget that they could have been sued by people they came in contact with for a variety of reasons.
- **Biographies.** Written by historians or those who knew the person. Use the library, digital book websites, or an online bookseller to find rare or out of print editions.
- **Local, state, regional and/or national histories.** These could be found via FamilySearch or digitized through sources such as Heritage Quest, Ancestry or Google Books.

3. **Research the time period.** This can help you figure out the story and whether it is plausible. For example, I was told that one of my great-great grandfathers had been a Pony Express rider. When I started to look into that story I realized that there was no way this could be true. I looked at the who, where, when and why of the Pony Express. Who was the typical Pony Express rider? Why were they chosen to be riders? Where did they ride and most importantly when? Just answering a few of those questions led me to realize that this was simply a family legend and not a fact. Start your research by asking yourself, could this be true, does it make sense? And then go out and research it to confirm or deny its validity. Confirming or denying family stories means more than just looking up some government records like the census, military, or vital records. It can mean acting as a detective and checking out the story and all those involved.

Some websites that may help...

A first stop in researching your black sheep ancestor is the website, **Blacksheep Ancestors** at <http://blacksheepancestors.com/>. This website is a collection of prison, insane asylum records, and biographies of famous n'er do wells, including outlaws and famous criminals. This site includes records from the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. In the case of American records, you can select the state you are interested in.

Do your family legends hint at an **FBI** file opened on one of your ancestors? Through the Freedom of Information Act, you can request information from the file of a deceased family member. The FBI's website has instructions and forms for accessing that information at <https://www.fbi.gov/services/records-management/foipa>. Besides requesting the file of an ancestor, you can look at the digitized file of someone famous via the FBI's website, The Vault <https://vault.fbi.gov/>. The FBI's website includes an alphabetical listing of historical figures, famous people, and criminals whose FBI file you can look at online. Celebrities including Gracie Allen, Desi Arnez, Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley and the Beatles to just name a few are part of the online FBI file digitized images. Genealogy website Fold3 includes World War I era FBI files, <https://www.fold3.com/title/74/fbi-case-files>.

Don't forget to continue researching your black sheep as you would any other ancestor. Those that are in jails, prison, and mental health facilities will still be enumerated in the U.S. Federal Census. Also, men who were eligible for the World War I draft and were in prison were still registered for the draft. According to John J. Newman's book, *Uncle, We are Ready: Registering America's Men 1917-1918*, the following referred to men who were imprisoned during the World War I draft registration. "While felons will be considered morally unfit for military service and will not be drafted, those of the designated age, will, in every case, be registered" (p. 30). It's important to learn about the records you research; why they were created and what they do and do not include.

Resources

Books

Arons, Ron. *The Jews of Sing Sing: Gotham Gangsters and Genuvims*. Fort Lee, New Jersey: Barricade Books 2016.

Colletta, John P, and Michael Hait. *Only a Few Bones: A True Account of the Rolling Fork Tragedy and Its Aftermath*. Dexter, Michigan: Thomson-Shore, 2015.

McClure, Rhonda R. *Finding Your Famous (and Infamous) Ancestors: Uncover the Rogues, Renegades and Royals in Your Family Tree*. Cincinnati, Ohio: Betterway, 2004.

Websites

Genealogy Databases

FamilySearch: www.familysearch.org

Ancestry.com: www.ancestry.com

New England Historic and Genealogical Society: www.americanancestors.org/index.aspx

Fold3: www.fold3.com/

Libraries/Archives

National Archives: www.archives.gov/

World Cat: www.worldcat.org/

Library of Congress: www.loc.gov/

ArchiveGrid: <https://researchworks.oclc.org/archivegrid/>

Newspapers

U.S. News Archives on the Web: www.ibiblio.org/slanews/internet/archives.html

GenealogyBank: www.genealogybank.com/

Newspapers.com: www.newspapers.com/

Library of Congress: Chronicling America: <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>

The Ancestor Hunt: www.theancestorhunt.com/

Wikipedia – List of online newspapers archives:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:List_of_online_newspaper_archives

Books

Google Books: <https://books.google.com/>

Google Scholar: <https://scholar.google.com/>

Internet Archive: www.archive.org/

Project Gutenberg: www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Main_Page

Hathi Trust: www.hathitrust.org/

Godfrey Memorial Library: www.godfrey.org/

Accessible Archives: www.accessible-archives.com/