

5 Steps for Fact-Checking Online Trees

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Graphic: Canva

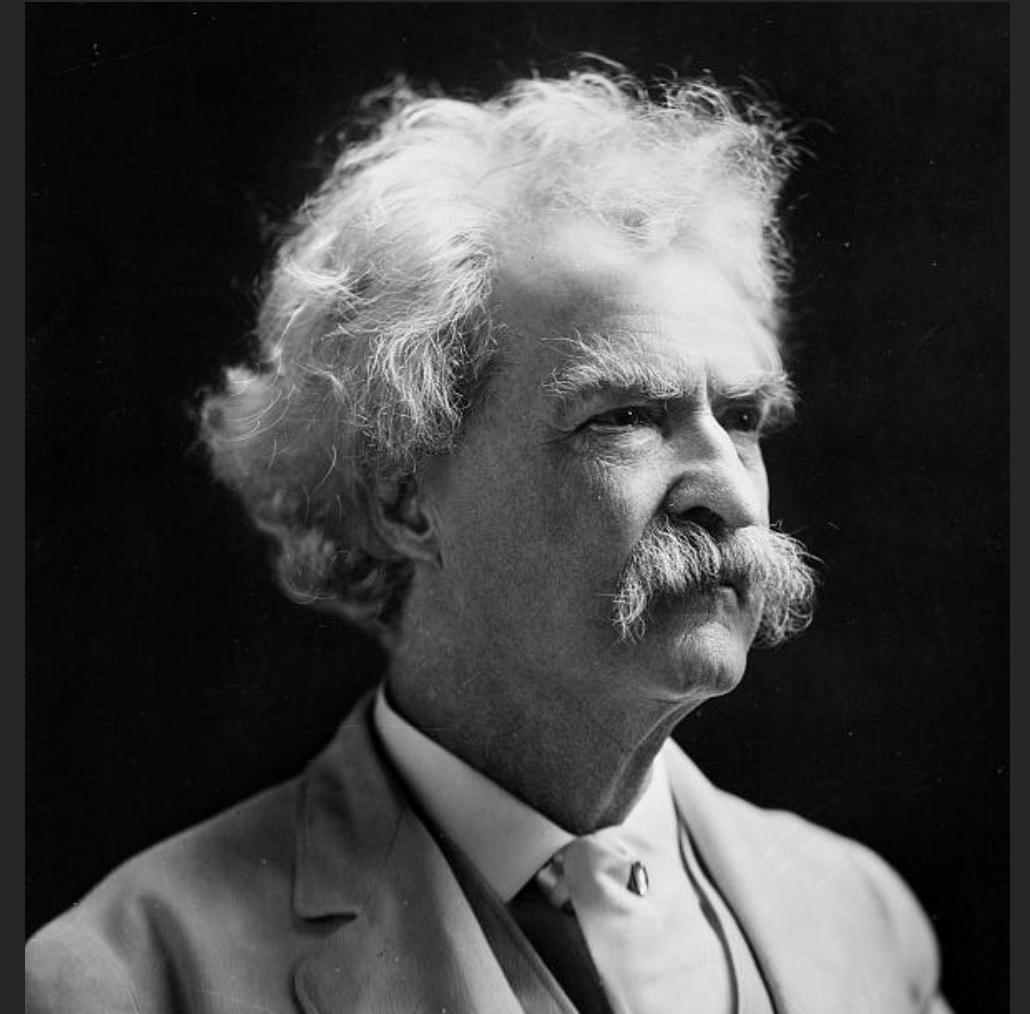
“A lie can travel halfway
around the world while
the truth is putting its
boots on.”



Winston Churchill

Photo: “The Roaring Lion” by Yousuf Karsh from Wikimedia Commons (public domain)

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Mark Twain

Photo: Library of Congress (public domain)

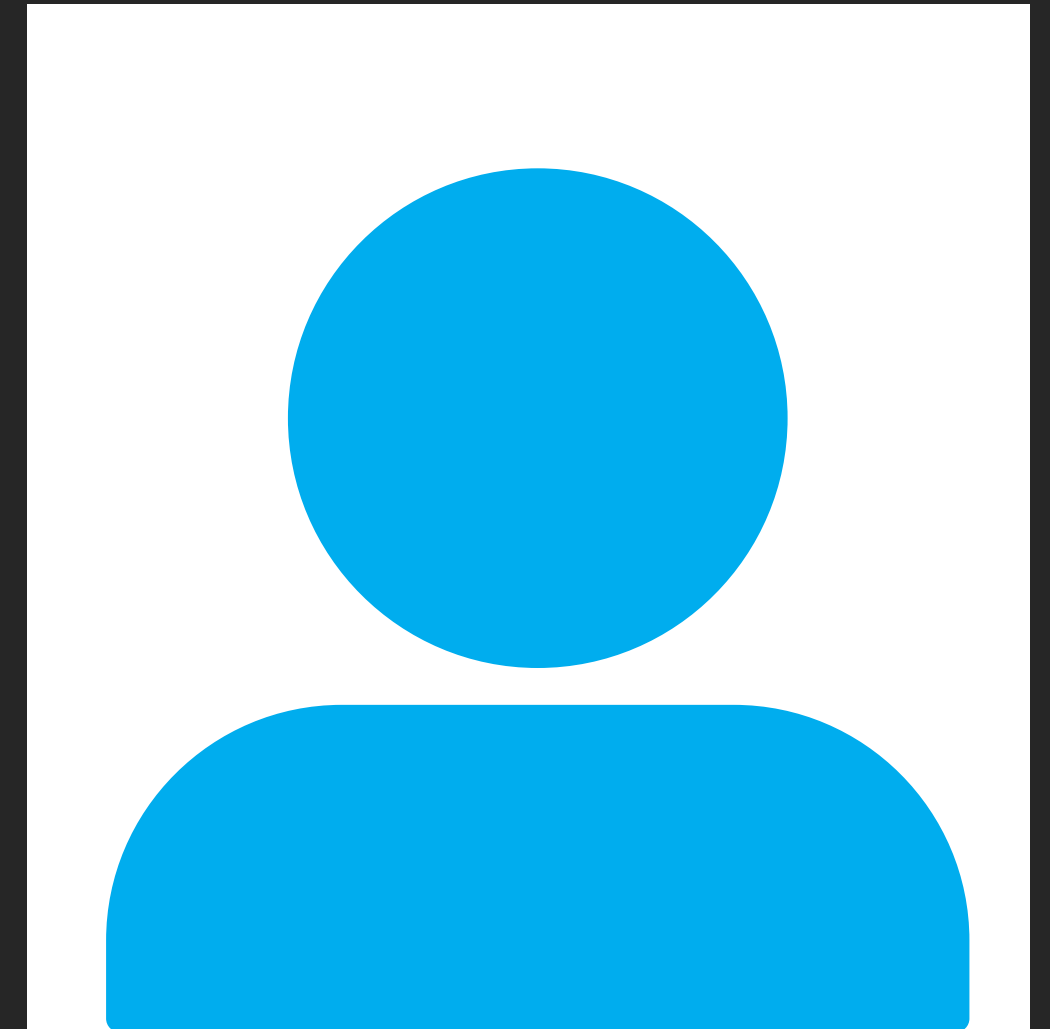
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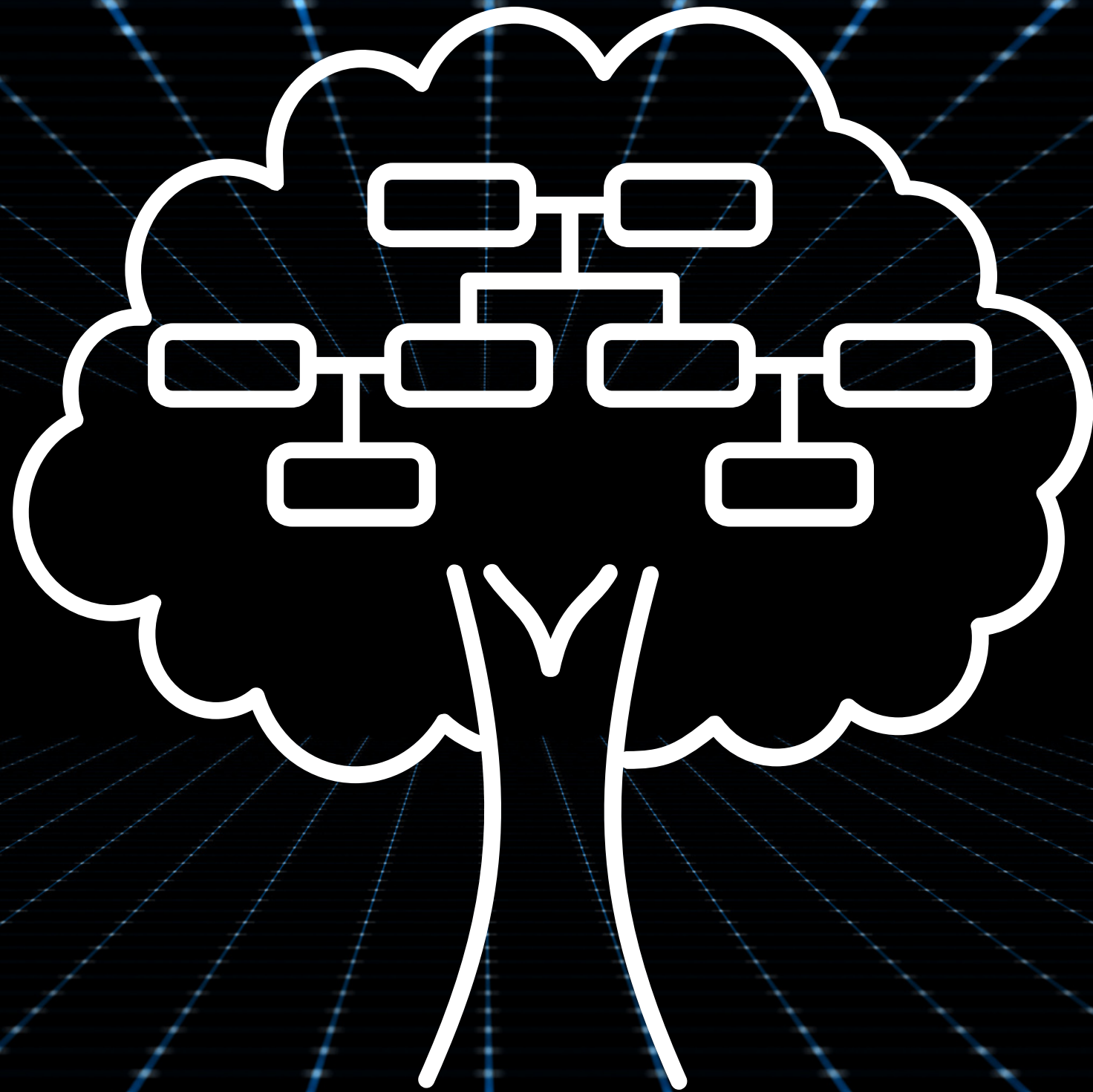
Cordell Hull

Photo: Library of Congress (public domain)

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?????



Lies spread quickly,
without regard for
accuracy...

...especially in online
family trees



Where to Search Online Trees

- **Ancestry.com:** Public Member Trees www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1030, or in record hints
- **MyHeritage:** Family Trees www.myheritage.com/research/category-5000/family-trees?s=552266111, or in Smart Matches
- **FamilySearch:** The Family Tree www.familysearch.org/tree/overview, or "Find Similar People"

1. Confirm the profile is a reasonable match



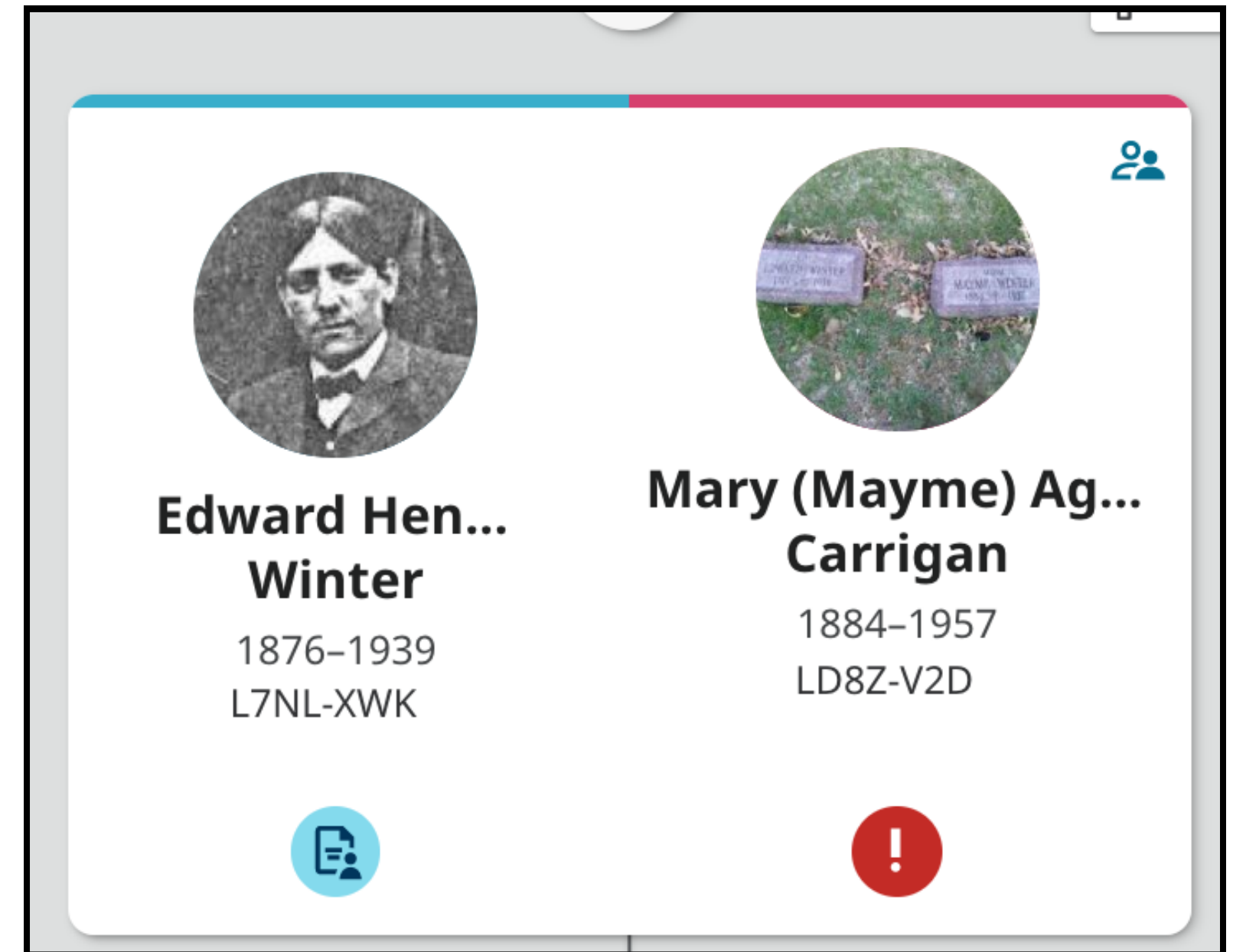
How do the details line up with what you already know?

- Names
- Age
- Birthplace or place of residence
- Relationships

2. Rule out impossibilities

Did the other user make common genealogy errors, such as:

- Children born before parents
- Mothers giving birth too young or too old
- People living in two places at once



Screenshot for FamilySearch Family Tree; the exclamation icon indicates the Tree has identified a data error

3. Look for citations



Did the other user
cite sources *at all*?

Quality > quantity

Discount sources that
are other family
trees.

The screenshot displays two panels from Ancestry.com. The left panel, titled 'A mega family tree like no other', shows a profile for 'Hon. Franklin Delano Roosevelt Sr.' with birth and death dates and locations. A red circle highlights the 'sources (50)' link. The right panel, titled 'Franklin Delano Roosevelt from your tree', shows a similar profile for 'Franklin Delano Roosevelt' with birth and death dates and locations. Both panels include a 'Family Info' section listing parents, spouse, and children.

Relationship	Name	Birth	Death	Location
Father	James Roosevelt	1828	1900	
Mother	Sara Lyman Delano	1854	1941	
Spouse	Anna Eleanor Roosevelt	1884	1962	Married 1905
Children	Anna Eleanor	1906	1975	
	Hon. James O.	1907	1991	
	Franklin D.	1909	1909	
	Brig. Gen. Elliott	1910	1990	
	Franklin Delano	1914	1988	
	John Aspinwall	1916	1981	

Relationship	Name	Birth	Death	Location
Father	James Roosevelt	1828	1919	
Mother	Sara Ann Delano	1854	1951	
Spouse	Eleanor Roosevelt	1884	-	Married 1905
Children	Anna	1907	-	
	James	1908	-	
	Elliott	1910	1990	
	John	1917	-	
	Franklin F	1918	-	

Ancestry.com screenshot of a record hint to a Public Member Tree

4. Review linked sources



Does the source actually say what the other user says it does?

- Indexing errors
- Omissions
- Misunderstandings
- Handwriting



Photo: Canva

5. Make a decision



Did the other user provide enough evidence?

Add only information that you can verify.

Attach the source/record itself, not the profile.

The screenshot displays a side-by-side comparison of two family tree profiles for Henry Winter. The left profile, titled 'In your family tree', shows Henry Winter as a 'Direct ancestor (5 generations)' with parents Thomas Winter and Rebecca Winter, wife Isabella Winter (born Garrett), and child Edward Winter. The right profile, titled 'Web Site managed by', shows Henry H Winter (1853 - 1926) with parents Thomas John Winter and Rebecca Winter, siblings Elizabeth Winter, Sarah Winter, Edith Winter, Roland Winter, Lilian Winter, and Winter, wife Isabelle Winter, partner Winter, and children Edward Henry Winter, William John Winter, Clara Schulte (born Winter), Thomas George Winter, and Nellie R Winters. Below the profiles are input fields for Name (First name, Last name) and Birth (Date, Place). The right profile's fields are marked as 'IMPROVED' or 'NEW'.

Field	In your family tree	Web Site managed by
Name		
First name	Henry	Henry H IMPROVED
Last name	Winter	Winter
Birth		
Date		Sep 17 1853 NEW
Place		Cincinnati, Hamilton, OH, USA NEW

Screenshot of MyHeritage Smart Match "extract information" tool

BONUS: Suggest edits



Ancestry and MyHeritage
Message the other user to
present evidence

FamilySearch
Edit the fact directly, and
add reasoning

Birth
0 People Following • 13 Past Contributors

Date of Birth
May 1884
✓ Standardized Date [What's this?](#)

Birthplace
Cincinnati, Ohio, United States
✓ Standardized Place [What's this?](#)

Reason This Information Is Correct

Last Changed: July 7, 2015
C

[SEE ALL CHANGES](#)

Sources (10) [TAG SOURCES](#)

- 1900
Mary A Carrigan, "United States Census, 1900"
May 1884
Ohio
- 1903
Mayme Carrigan, "Kentucky, County Marriages, 1797-1954"
1882
- 1903
Mayme Carrigan in entry for Edw H Winter, "Kentucky Marriages, 1785-1979"
1882
- 1910
Mayme Winter, "United States Census, 1910"
1885
Ohio
- 1914

Screenshot of FamilySearch edit profile window

*family*tree MAGAZINE

Web version

[www.familytreemagazine.com/strategies/
fact-check-family-trees](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/strategies/fact-check-family-trees)

Photo: Canva

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