

# Brick Walls! Real? or Created Through Faulty Research?

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*As researchers, at some time—usually many times, we will find ourselves facing the proverbial brick wall. Some of these brick walls will, because of record loss or other reasons, be difficult, if not impossible, to overcome. We create others ourselves because we fail to understand a record or the law that created it, believe what we should not, or simply fail to look in the right place at the right time. This lecture looks at some of these pitfalls and false trails and suggests ways to avoid them and/or to uncover new leads that may take your research around them.*

## Begin with Evaluation and Verification

### Re-examine completed research—

- Re-read and re-evaluate your work
- Build a time line
- Create an in-and-out table for land
- Look for what's missing

### Examine the records more closely—

#### False trails—

- Family legends
- Published genealogies (in print and online)
- Reliance on a single document

## Errors—

Transcription errors

in the official record,

published records,

certified mistakes

Misunderstanding—But I thought . . . .

Missing

from the index,

from the record,

from the published version

## Sorry, it doesn't exist—

The courthouse burned

The clerk doesn't know or doesn't care

Misfiled

Computer databases and Web searches

## Sorry, it didn't exist (or is never mentioned)

Divorces

Second marriages

Unwed mothers and illegitimate children

Runaway children

Felons

Individuals with disabilities

Suicide

## False assumptions—

Know the law

Do the background research: learn about the history, social customs, etc. of the area of interest

When the experts are wrong

Reliable sources, but were they the source and was that what they said?

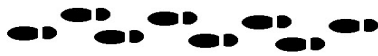
## Public servants and public records

Of tax and census takers--

The census missed people in 1820, too

Perjury is not a twentieth-century phenomena

## Widen Your Research Circle



*When a hound dog loses a trail he moves in ever-widening circles searching until he finds it again. As genealogists we, too, need at times to move in ever-widening circles of time, place, and people in our search to pick up our ancestor's trail.*

## Begin new research targeted to the research question

Follow any identified property (identifying children)

Follow the widow (identifying children)

Follow the collaterals (identifying parentage)

Look at the neighbors (identifying prior residence)

## Remove the artificial barriers of time, people, and place

Expand the time period of your search (court cases can last for decades)

Expand the area of your search especially if there is a nearby state or county border

Look for records in new places

## **Look for new records—**

WPA

Pension records—unselected records and rejected pensions

State-level records—legislative records, governor's papers, etc.

Published papers of government officials

Merchant's accounts

Private papers

Court suits and loose papers—depositions, subpoenas

Road orders

Theses and dissertations

Church records

The other census records

Surveys and maps

Postmasters, phone books, and city directories

Institutional and fraternal organization records

## **Consult the experts for resources and clues**

FamilySearch Wikis

State and local archives and libraries (and their staff)

Published research guides

National Park Service and state parks in the area of interest (and their staff)

## **Review databases, such as**

ProQuest

JSTOR

**And remember the key to success—**

**If at first you don't succeed, try, try, again.**