

# Help! There's No Class on Researching My Ancestral Homeland

Sunny Morton is a Contributing Editor at [Family Tree Magazine](#), Content Director at [YourDNAGuide.com](#), and Coordinator of the 2024 “Using U.S. Church Records for Family History” course at the [Genealogical Research Institute of Pittsburgh](#). She is co-author of [How to Find Your Family History in U.S. Church Records](#) with Harold Henderson, CG (Genealogical Publishing Co) and author of the life-story writing guide, [Story of My Life: A Workbook for Preserving Your Legacy](#). Find her at [www.sunnymorton.com](#).



If you haven't been able to learn how to research your roots in a specific ancestral homeland, this class is for you! Preparing to research in a new place is like preparing to travel there: you need to find the right resources to help you get the most out of your experience.

## Google (or your favorite web browser)

Search terms: Name of place/population + genealogy + guide

Tip: You can start here, but don't stop here. Google misses things and doesn't always prioritize the best resources for your needs.

## FamilySearch Wiki: Travel Guide for Genealogists

FamilySearch.org > Search > Research Wiki

Video tutorial: [How to use the FamilySearch Wiki and Catalog](#)

Things to look for on the FamilySearch Wiki:

- History
- Maps, Jurisdictions, geographical finding aids
- Record types and research strategies
- Beginner tips
- Online record finders
- Word translation lists, date converters
- Ask the Community: Social hub for asking questions and advice

[FamilySearch Learning Center](#) and [FamilySearch Communities](#) (FamilySearch Help and Groups)

## Directories: Cyndi's List and “Find a Society

[Cyndi's List](#) (Categories > Country, Cultural or Language Group)

[Genealogy on Facebook List](#)

[National Genealogical Society “Find a Society” search](#)

## Look for Books

- [FamilySearch Catalog](#): Country > Genealogy – Handbooks, manuals, etc
- Library of Congress: Handbooks for Foreign Genealogical Research ([archived version now searchable](#) via Internet Archive's Wayback Machine)
- [Library of Congress Local History & Genealogy Guides](#) (new portal)

TIP: Look for resources that have been digitized (Google them) or may be available at a library near you (WorldCat)

## Historical Records on Genealogy Websites

**It's free to explore their collection catalogs without a subscription**

**FamilySearch.org** (Free, GLOBAL)

- [Search with or without logging in](#) > Browse all Collections
- Video tutorial review: [How to Find Records on FamilySearch](#)
- Search > Catalog > Individual items (look for links to record images)
- Search > Historical Images hosts billions of newly-imaged record images
- TIP: Search browse-only records page-by-page. Individual record volumes or collections may have handwritten indexes, tables of contents, etc at the beginning/end.
- TIP: Search nearly ½ million digitized book volumes under Search > Books. Use keywords such as ancestral names, towns, businesses, schools, churches, etc.
- Details may include which records are included, what's in them, search tips, suggested next steps and how to cite the collection. Find these details on that collection's search page or by clicking on the hyperlinked collection title in the list of search results.

**Ancestry.com** (\$, North America, British Isles, Australia, Germany, France, Italy, Sweden)

- [Search without logging in](#) or log in and Search > Catalog
- Filter by keyword/name, place, record type, time period and language and *sort* by collection size, popularity, date added to site/updated.

**Findmypast.com** (\$, England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, British Empire/Colonies)

- [Search without logging in](#) or log in and Search > All record sets
- The Findmypast catalog is more limited, allowing searches only by keyword/title, and then sorting by title, collection size, and record category or sub-category.
- For best luck finding certain types of records, try using a single keyword or phrase at a time, such as *Revolutionary War* or *Aberdeen*.

**MyHeritage**: (\$, global, strengths for Scandinavian, Jewish, German, other European research)

- [Search without logging in](#) or log in and Research > Collection catalog
- The MyHeritage catalog lets you *filter* by keyword/name, place, record type, time period and whether images are available and *sort* by collection name, size, and when updated.

## Here's an Idea: Create Your Own "Locality Guide"

A locality guide is a reference tool you can create for yourself when searching in a new place, a concept well described by professional genealogist Jan Joyce. Joyce uses this concept for describing locales in the United States; adapt it to create a country-level resource for yourself. The second article has a template for creating your own locality guide.

Joyce, Jan, "Creating and Using Locality Guides as Genealogical Tools," *National Genealogical Society Magazine* (48: 3) July - September 2022, pp. 31-35.

Joyce, Jan, "A Locality Guide Case Study by Jan Joyce, DBA, CG, CGL, AG," *Genealogy Logically* (<https://genealogylogically.com/locality-guide>), accessed 20 September 2023.

## DNA Testing: Follow Your DNA Back Home

### [Free guide to DNA ethnicity and frequently-asked-questions](#)

More specific ancestral places and populations are found in [AncestryDNA Communities](#) and [MyHeritage Genetic Groups](#)

### [Why My Grandma's Swedish Roots are More Detailed than Mine](#)

Tip: Test with a company that offers the [most detailed look at your expected ethnic regions](#). Read about the best DNA test options for [African](#), [Asian](#), [Scottish](#), [Irish](#) or [Portuguese](#) ancestry.

Story: [Finding Ed's Portuguese immigrant ancestor using DNA matches](#)

*Why don't I have matches from my ancestral place?*

- People from/in that place aren't widely testing
- No other descendants have tested at your testing company
- [Finding DNA matches outside the United States](#)

Tips for searching for roots outside the United States:

- Set reasonable expectations
- Test as many places as you can
- Compare your ethnicity and Community/Groups results
- Reach out to DNA matches
- Be patient
- Check back every few months for new matches and updated ethnicity