

Searching for Missing Records

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Searching old records concerning your ancestors is difficult under the best circumstances and under difficult circumstances it seems nearly impossible. After all normal means of finding the information you need is exhausted; it is time for some creative thinking.

Search the courthouse thoroughly. Look for miscellaneous papers that are often filed with "Courthouse Cases" and sometimes with "Marriage Papers." These are usually considered "Loose Papers" and can hold real treasures. If certain records were destroyed, try other records in the same courthouse. If the Will Book was destroyed, try the Deed Book or Court Records. Always check military records while at the courthouse. Application papers may be among them and these provide invaluable information.

Once you have researched the county courthouse where your ancestor lived it is time to branch out. Try the parent county by looking up the date the county was created; transactions prior to that date are in the parent county. Next if you know the community, locate the closest county courthouse to this community. It may be closer than the county seat. If the closest court house is two hours away by horseback and their county seat is a two day trip, chances are they recorded the information in the closest county.

If they owned land in more than one county, the information will be found in the deed books. REMEMBER - every county and every state where he owned land would have received a copy of his will. If the courthouse was destroyed, try District Courts or higher Courts of Appeals Records. Check to see if copies were sent to the State Archives.

In the 1930's, when Roosevelt accepted the nomination for president he said "I pledge you, I pledge myself to a new deal for the American people." After he was elected president, the programs and policies making up the "New Deal" contained a section called the Works Progress Administration. It was founded in 1935 to provide work for those in need on public works projects. One of these projects was copying records in government offices. So be sure to check the WPA Survey Records to see what exists and where these records can be found. Most of them will be at the State Library or State Archives.

Many records that are missing may have been reconstructed. Many states have gone to considerable trouble to try and reconstruct the 1890 census from tax lists, land records, and other available information.

Next, try old newspapers. These can be found on microfilm or sometimes in local Historical Societies. Write to the Chairman of the History Department of a college or university, and inquire if there are any records about the county you are researching in their possession. Visit the cemeteries, many graves have a great deal of information carved on the tombstone.

Last, but not least, DO NOT GIVE UP, INFORMATION COMES TO THOSE WHO PERSEVERE.