

Arab American Genealogy Research: An Introduction

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Definitions Used in Presentation

- **Arab Americans** – Individuals residing in the United States from, or descendants from, countries identified as Arab
- **MENA Region** – Middle East North Africa Region
- **SWANA Region** – Southwest Asia North Africa Region

Issues Hindering Research

- Not all people from the region identify as Arab.
- Some people identify Arab countries as the 22 countries of the Arab League.

Arab League Members		
Algeria	Bahrain	Comoros
Djibouti	Egypt	Iraq
Jordan	Kuwait	Lebanon
Libya	Mauritania	Morocco
Oman	Palestine	Qatar
Saudi Arabia	Somalia	Sudan
Syria	Tunisia	United Arab Emirates
	Yemen	

- There are people of many other ethnic/cultural-identities in the region that do not identify as Arab.

Examples

Afghan, African, Armenian, Assyrian/Chaldean Azerbaijani, Circassian, Georgian, Imazighen (Berber), Iranian, Kurdish, Turkish, etc.

- There are diverse religious identities and records.

Issues Hindering Research (cont.)

- There are no clear Arab or MENA/SWANA identifications in US records.
- US Records use changing identities for Arabs or others from the region.
- Spelling variations and naming practices are unfamiliar to researchers.
- There are language barriers to research.
- There is limited research on enslaved North Africans who may have identified as Arab or spoke Arabic.

Historical Considerations

- MENA region historical context



- US historical context

Where to start – Before looking at records

- **Around the house** – What records do you have or you can get from family members?
- **Interview family members** – Do you have living relatives in the US or abroad that you can interview about your family history?
- **Write down what you know** – Write out or use a computer program to include all you know about your family history - names, places, dates, stories.

Examples of traditional US genealogy records

- Census – State
- Census – Federal
- Vital records
- Immigration records
- Newspapers
- Court records
- Land records
- Religious records

Place Identification Variations – The following are examples of US documents where varying names for the same birth location is listed for an individual — Helen Nasiff:

- **Tur. As. Syrian (Indexed as Turkey) – 1910 Federal Census** – Citation: 1910 U.S. census, Linn County, Iowa, population schedule, Rapids Township, Cedar Rapids City, ward 6, enumeration district (ED) 109, sheet 8B, dwelling 1222, family 180, line 76, Helen Nasiff; NARA microfilm publication T624, roll 411; *Family Search* (familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9RJ1-SFT?i=15).

“**Tur. As.**” or **Turkey-Asia** designation is from the 1910 Enumerator Instruction No. 121. “For persons born in the double Kingdom of Austria-Hungary, be sure to distinguish Austria from Hungary. For person born in Finland, write Finland and not ‘Russia.’ For persons born in Turkey, be sure to distinguish Turkey in Europe from Turkey in Asia.” Citation: U.S. Bureau of the Census, “1910 Census Instructions to Enumerators,” excerpted on pages 45-57 from *Measuring America: The Decennial Censuses, From 1790 to 2000: US Census Bureau* (census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/technical-documentation/questionnaires/1910/1910-instructions.html).

- **Arabia – 1925 Iowa State Census** – Citation: 1925 Iowa state census, Linn County, population schedule, Cedar Rapids, line 121, for Helen Nasiff, 1401 4th Street in Rastan Nasiff Household; *Ancestry* (ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/1084/images/IA1925_1808-0667).
- **Syria – 1926 Marriage Record** – Iowa Department of Public Health, Iowa, marriage certificate no. 27222 (1926), Ed. Hidder – Helen David; Iowa Marriage Records, 1923–1937, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines; “Iowa, U.S., Marriage Records, 1880–1951,” *Ancestry* (ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/8823/images/41697_329228-01699).
- **Lebanon** – “Helen Hidder,” obituary, *The Gazette* (Cedar Rapids, Iowa), 4 May 1992, p. 10, col. 1; *Newspapers.com* (newspapers.com/clip/86741550/helen-nasiff-david-hidderobituary).

Methodology Tip

- Use FAN research (Elizabeth Shown Mills) also known as cluster research – Arabs often travel together or to a place someone else had already visited.

Immigration Record Tips

- Check records going in & out of the United States
- Check naturalization records
- Check border crossings from Mexico, not only passenger lists
- Check consular records – registrations, birth abroad

Arabic Name Tips

- In most Arab countries, legal documents list 4 names–given name, father's name, grandfather's name and family name–instead of the Western use of 3 names. Upon immigration to the US, the family or clan name might be dropped.
- Traditions – Father's name as middle name or eldest son named after grandfather
- Dashes/spaces optional – Example: *Abdul-latif* same as *AbdulLatif* and *Abdul Latif*
- Spelling variations – Example: *Sabreen* same as *Sabrine* same as *Sabrin*
- *Khoury* = Priest (could be name or title)
- *El* & *Al* = the (sometimes dropped off name) – Example: *Al Rashid* same as *Rashid*
- Relationship names – Examples: *Bin* = son of, *Abu* = father of
- Ending of last name may come from a profession, like the English name Smith
Examples: *Haddad* = blacksmith, *Najjar* = carpenter
- Name could indicate a relationship to another country (or not)
Examples: *Al Maghribi* – Moroccan, *Masri* – Egyptian, *Sudani* – Sudanese
- Also, *awi* at the end of a name could mean the family came from a town
Example: *Rimawi* – from the Palestinian village of Beit Rima (*Beit* = house)

Research Resources

- **US Records** – photosmemoriesbyreem.com/arab-american-genealogy-research
- **Records Outside the US** – photosmemoriesbyreem.com/arab-genealogy-research

DNA – Genetic Genealogy

- **Testing** – Many Arab Americans are taking DNA tests - mostly on *Ancestry* (and other sites) but also Y and Mitochondrial DNA on *Family Tree DNA*.
- **Family Tree DNA Group Projects** – Group Projects provide communities for people who are interested in a specific topic. There are at least 18 groups related to Arab DNA – some country specific and others are name specific.

National Society for Arab and Arab American Genealogy (NSAB) - The mission of the organization is to foster interest in Arab & Arab American genealogy, by encouraging education, research, writing & recording family histories and preserving records.

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