

Searching for the Smiths: A Case Study

Presented for the Genealogy Center at Allen County Public Library

by Jessica Conklin - February 25, 2025

Helpful Online Resources:

The Shared Centimorgan Project: <http://dnainter.com/tools/sharedcmv4-beta>

The Leeds Method: <http://www.danaleeds.com/the-leeds-method> (blog post instructions) or http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zMDbU72_-Ms (YouTube video tutorial)

AncestryDNA Dot System: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MRrEEDziYAs>

Brick Wall Busters:

- Define your genealogical question. Who or what, *specifically*, are you looking for?
- Make a research plan and be methodical. List all the places you can find what you're looking for and try them one by one.
- Take notes along the way so you can jump right back into your research where you left off in case you need to step away for a while.
- Be patient with hard-to-find ancestors. You may need to go page by page in one census instead of using a searchable index, or use city directories for annual traceability instead of a 10-year census gap, or gather data on several potential families to rule some of them out.
- Ask living family members about your brick wall ancestors and double-check the accuracy of the information they give you with documentation whenever possible.
- Research collateral relatives (siblings, cousins, etc.) who may lead to more information about your target brick wall ancestor.
- When you find conflicting sources of information, evaluate each of them critically and look for more sources to support/refute them.
- Use other people's public family trees with caution. Consider them "clues" and independently verify the information they provide.
- Ask a friend or a professional to look over your work and provide suggestions.
- Test the DNA of family members from older generations if possible.
- Organize DNA matches any way that works for you to help focus on the matches of interest.
- Examine matches of interest thoroughly – don't assume you know how they're related to you without examining *all* possibilities.
- Use DNA to support theoretical relationships, not necessarily to prove them.
- Don't give up! DNA can help break down brick walls, and you never know when a key DNA match will join the testing database.

