



PUTTING THOSE RECORDS TO WORK

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Overview: Every document we locate in genealogical research has its clear use: a census record will help us identify family members and trace them over time; a court record will tell us what was happening with that person at that time; a will or probate record will help recreate a family at a specific point in time. But every document we locate can be mined—directly or in combination with other records—for more: a deeper richer context for our family members and their place and time.

To get the most from genealogical records, we have to look at them for more than face value. Every record and every record type tells more of the story than we will get by just extracting names and dates and places:

- **Census records** can reconstruct neighborhoods, give clues as to health and employment, tell us what language was spoken at home, what their relative socio-economic status was, and who the record-makers may be for further research.
- **Court records** can tell us both who was in our family's FAN club (friends, associates and neighbors) and who their enemies were, immigration status and voting, and what the primary drivers were for the local economy.
- **Land records** can also help identify our family's FAN club, but can document marital status, family size, military service, and naturalization status,
- **Probate and will records** can identify family members including heirs at law, but also show occupation, national origin, religion. They can even highlight family dynamics by helping us spot family members who were well-regarded by the deceased and those who were distinctly disfavored.
- **Tax records** can help establish death dates (or date ranges), distinguish persons of the same name, identify sons as they came of age, evidence remarriages of widows, show general and relative wealth of an ancestor in a community, and serve as census substitutes where the census records are lost or destroyed.
- **Vital records** can help identify family members not named in the record, pinpoint locations, and identify record-makers whose documents can be useful.

Putting records to work, then, means extracting *every clue* from every record and evaluating it with every other clue from every other record in light of applicable laws.

A working example of the potential clues within a document:

LAST WILL OF JOHN YAGER	EVIDENCE COMMENTS
<p>I John Yager Senr. (of the piney woods) doth make this my last will & testament revoking and disanuling or [sic] wills or testaments by me heretofore made declaring this, and only this to be my last will and testament in manner and form following (that is to say) -</p>	<p>Location clue</p>
<p>I give unto my son John H. Yager all the property and money that he hath received of me upon marriage or otherwise, and the further sum of one dollar as and for his full and absolute share of my estate.</p>	<p>Children in birth order? John married?</p>
<p>I give unto the children of my daughter Susanah say the children that she had by her first husband, Ephraim Fleshman the sum of ten pounds each to be paid out of the moneys arising from my estate.</p>	<p>Treatment of daughter More than one marriage? Pounds vs. dollars</p>
<p>I give unto my son Samuel Yager all the property and money that he received upon marriage or otherwise and the further sum of one dollar as and for his full and absolute share of my Estate.</p>	<p>Samuel married?</p>
<p>I give unto my son Jacob Yager all the property and money that he recd. of me upon marriage or otherwise and the further sum of one dollar to be paid out of my Estate as and for his absolute share of my Estate.</p>	<p>Jacob married?</p>
<p>I give unto my son Joseph Yager all the property and money that he received of me upon marriage or otherwise and the further sum of one dollar to be paid out of my estate as and for his full and absolute share of my Estate ----</p>	<p>Joseph married?</p>
<p>I give unto my daughter Mary Clore all the property and money that she received of me upon marriage or otherwise, and the further sum of one hundred dollars to be paid out of my Estate, as and for her absolute part of my Estate.</p>	<p>Mary married? Additional legacy</p>
<p>I give unto my Grand daughter Rhody Chick (wife to Wm L. Chick) the sum of fifty dollars to be paid out of my estate.</p>	<p>Granddaughter old enough to marry</p>
<p>It is my will and desire that my old negro woman Milley, shall [have] the priviledge of choosing her master, and that whoever she may choose, shall have her at valuation.</p>	<p>Slaveholder, but allowing choice of master</p>

It is my will and desire that the ballance of my Estate should be sold and they money arising (after the payment of my debts) together with the debts that may be due me shall be applied to the payment of the aforesaid legacies_ But in case there should not be a sufficiency to satisfy the whole, in that case each Legatee shall be entitled in proportion agreeable to the aforesaid legacies_ but in case there should be more than a sufficiency to satisfy the said legacies In that case my will is that my daughter Susannah should have the overplus_

Lastly I constitute and appoint my friends Michel Berry and John G. Brown Executors of this my last will and testament_ As witness my hand and seal this 13th day of February 1816.

his
John X Yager (seal)
mark

Sign'd, Seal'd and acknowledged before us

John Walker

his
Elijah X Holbert
mark

Edwd. C. F Patrick

his
Thos. X Eagan
mark

At a Court held for Madison County the 23rd day of January 1823 . This Last Will and testament of John Yager Senr. deceased was produced into Court and proved by the oaths of Edward C. Fitzpatrick and Thos Eagan two of the witnesses thereto and ordered to be recorded. And on the motion of Michael Berry and John G. Brown Exors therein named. certificate of probat thereof in due form is granted them, whereupon they qualified and entered into bond with security according to Law

Teste

Belfield Cave CM [Clerk, Madison County]

Size of estate

Susannah to receive balance

**Who are these men to
testator?**

Testator not literate

**Witnesses a mix of literate
and illiterate**

Number of witnesses

Seven years to probate

Bond with security

Madison County, Virginia, Will Book 4:184-185, Will of John Yager dated 13 February 1816

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Web addresses verified as of 14 September 2023

MORE THAN JUST NAMES:

ADVANCED US CENSUS RESEARCH

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OVERVIEW

One of the key genealogical resources in the United States is the census. Taken every 10 years starting in 1790, it produces a snapshot of residents allowing us to track our ancestors through time. It gives us one of the best avenues available to put names to the members of our families. ***But that's not all it does.*** Really mining the census data for everything it can tell us can give us clues to marriage dates, birthplaces, occupations, socioeconomic status, physical ailments, military service and so much more.

NAMES, YES, BUT...

The population schedules of the United States census will give us the names of family members and, at least starting in 1850, of those with whom they were living. But every single population schedule – even those where everyone except the head of the household is just a tick mark – can provide clues to more information that we can use to accurately reconstruct our families.



Read the directions! Every census had directions given to the census-takers on who to record, what information to record and how to record it. Get the Census Bureau PDF : <https://bit.ly/legalgen0514>

Once you've carefully read the instructions given to the enumerators, and you've recorded all of the names of family members in the census records, look for these ***additional*** clues – among others – in the population censuses:

- ✓ **1790-1810:** If not alphabetical, lists of neighbors in the same militia district.
- ✓ **1820:** Check mark column for foreigner not naturalized and for worker in agriculture, commerce or manufacture.
- ✓ **1830:** Persons who were deaf, dumb or blind. **Tip:** This census has two pages; make sure to look at the second page!

- ✓ **1840:** Number employed in various industries. Military pensioners and widows. Persons who were insane. School information. **Tip:** This census has two pages; make sure to look at the second page!
- ✓ **1850:** Names of all family members, ages and places of birth. If male over age 15, asked occupation. Value of real estate. If over 20, asked if could read and write. Tick mark for married within the prior year. Pauper or convict tick mark. **Tip:** Separate slave population schedules were taken, listing slave owners by name and slaves by age, sex, color, whether fugitive, number manumitted and disabled.
- ✓ **1860:** Value of personal estate (in southern states, could include slaves). **Tip:** Separate slave population schedules added number of slave houses.
- ✓ **1870:** Tick mark columns for persons whose parents were foreign-born. Month of birth if within the year, month of marriage if within the year. Tick mark columns for male citizens over age 21 and denied rights.
- ✓ **1880:** Relationship to head of household. Marital status. Birthplaces of parents. Months unemployed during year. Sickness or disability.
- ✓ **1890:** Some remnants survive and were microfilmed by NARA as M407.
- ✓ **1900:** Street and house number in cities. Month and year of birth. Years married. Mother of how many children total and now living. Year of immigration, number of years in US, naturalization status. English speaker. Home owned or rented; if owned, whether mortgaged. Farm or house and if farm on what farm schedule. **Tip:** This census may have clues to tribal association of Native Americans.
- ✓ **1910:** Language spoken if not English. Employment status. Tick mark for Union or Confederate Army or Navy survivor.
- ✓ **1920:** Mother tongue of each person and parent of each person.
- ✓ **1930:** Whether the family owned a radio. Age at first marriage. Immigration information including citizenship status. Veteran status. **Tip:** Black migration to the north hit its peak in the decade before 1930. Look here for clues to the southern origins of African American families.
- ✓ **1940:** Marital status code “M7” for a person married but living apart from the spouse. Years of schooling, residence in 1935, basic wage and employment information, foreign birth by country name as of 1937, and a mark (usually an X) identifying who gave the information.

ALL THE *OTHER* CENSUSES

Most genealogists stop when they have examined all of the regular population schedules for their families. But many other types of census schedules exist of enormous value to the genealogist. And there was one special interim census taken in some parts of the country in 1885 that included population and other schedules.

- ✓ **Agricultural (1850-1880):** Separate schedules were created reporting, for each farm, the name of owner or manager, number of improved and unimproved acres, cash value of the farm, farming machinery, types of animals and crops. Most post-1880 agricultural schedules do not survive.

- ✓ **Manufacturing (1810-1820, 1850-1880):** Separate schedules recorded data on manufacturing. In 1810, no directions were given to enumerators and little information was annotated on the population schedules. In 1820 and from 1850 to 1880, the schedules reported the name of the manufacturer, the type of business or product, and details on the business and employees.
- ✓ **Mortality (1850-1880):** Separate schedules recorded persons who died in the year preceding the population census, and noted the name, age, sex, marital status if married or widowed, state or country of birth, month of death, occupation, cause of death, and the length of the final illness.
- ✓ **Social Statistics (1850-1870):** Not reporting individuals but social conditions of the community instead, these schedules reported real estate values, taxes, schools, teachers, and pupils, libraries, newspapers, church denominations, native and foreign-born paupers and criminals convicted, and average wages.
- ✓ **Defective, Dependent, Delinquent Classes (1880):** A special list recorded only in 1880, this schedule included those regarded as insane, idiots, deaf-mutes, blind, homeless children, inhabitants in prison, pauper and indigent.
- ✓ **Semidecennial Census (1885):** Florida, Nebraska, Colorado and the Territories of New Mexico and Dakota took special censuses (population, agriculture, manufactures, and mortality) in 1885. The information on these schedules can fill in the gap left by the loss of the 1890 census.
- ✓ **Veterans (1890):** A special list recorded only in 1890, this schedule included Union Civil War veterans or their widows (though some Confederate veterans were recorded by mistake), the soldier's unit and service information and any disability. Records survive for part of Kentucky and Louisiana-Wyoming.

KEY TIPS TO ADVANCED CENSUS RESEARCH

- ✓ Don't give up just because your family isn't in the index. Read the records page by page, line by line. Look for household with the same sorts of people even if the names aren't exact. Don't worry about spelling (get creative in your searches!).
- ✓ Don't ever look for one name or even one family. Find the relatives in the area. Find the neighbors. Find all the people your people may have been associating with. Make sure you look across enumeration district and even county and state lines if your family lived near a border. Record everybody in the neighborhood.
- ✓ Always look to see who is recorded in the census who would have been among the record-makers of the community: doctors, lawyers, clergy, bankers and merchants all kept record books that may provide information about your family.
- ✓ Don't stop with one census, or even one type of census. Check all surviving census schedules for the entire time the family was in that place – and look for local, county, state and territorial censuses, school censuses and even religious censuses as well as all the different types of federal census schedules.
- ✓ Combine your census evidence with evidence from other lists. Things like city directories, road orders, tax lists, militia lists, and legislative petitions can be correlated with census data to provide a much deeper picture of a family.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

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All URLs verified as of 14 September 2023.

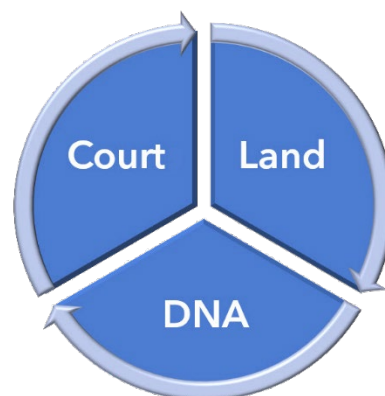
Landing the Fourths:

Proving a Case with Court, Land, and DNA Evidence

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Overview: There is little question as to the identity of the father of Gustavus Boone Robertson (1827 MS—1903 TX): William M. Robertson, born in North Carolina between 1795-1800, lived with Gustavus's family from before the 1850 census to his death in Attala County in 1864. But who was Gustavus's mother? No record directly identifies her, but court, land, and DNA evidence combine to prove the case as to the identity of this third great-grandmother and, in doing so, landing the fourths—fourth great-grandparents, that is.

The Genealogical Problem: No Direct Evidence.

Stating the research question in this case is easy: who was the mother of Gustavus Boone Robertson, born in Mississippi on 7 November 1827?

Documentary evidence, family lore and more establishes that Gustavus married Isabella Rankin Gentry in Mississippi (likely Neshoba County) in 1847, and the Robertsons lived in Winston County in 1850 and Attala County in 1860. Gustavus moved to northeastern Texas just after the Civil War with his Mississippi-born wife and their nine Mississippi-born children, settling first in Lamar County, where his last two children were born, and then in Delta County. Towards the end of his life, he and Isabella lived with a daughter in Hopkins County, Texas. Gustavus died there on 20 December 1903; Isabella died there on 20 September 1908.

Census records place William M. Robertson—a generation older than Gustavus—in Gustavus and Isabella's household in 1850 and 1860, strongly suggesting a father-son relationship between the two Robertson men. However, no direct evidence exists as to Gustavus' mother. She was not recorded in Gustavus' household; no census identifies a single Robertson woman. Birth and death records for this time either don't exist (Mississippi did not begin statewide birth recordation until 1912) or lack information about parents (Gustavus's death was recorded in a ledger with few details). Family stories suggested that her maiden name might have been Moore, but gave no clue as to a first name, birthdate or birth place, marriage date or marriage place.

The Genealogical Solution: Broaden the Search.

When vital records fail to connect a child to a parent, family researchers have to find alternative sources for evidence that will identify the missing parent. Building on a genealogical foundation that begins with analyzing all the known information, we broaden the search to include all reliable evidence that might help provide an answer. Three types of evidence that are generally the most promising are court records, land records, and DNA results.

Types of Court Records We Might Use

Every court record regardless of the court in which it was created or filed or its nature has the potential to contain genealogically-useful information. Some types are more likely than others to offer alternative sources of evidence identifying a parent, including:

- *Probate records*: From wills and will books to applications for letters testamentary or letters of administration, to estate inventories, annual accountings and final distributions, probate records are among the most valuable genealogical records that exist. Express evidence of relationship is often included in probate files.
- *Guardianships*: Whether chosen for a child coming into property or an adult incompetent to handle his or her own affairs, guardians were often family members and direct evidence of relationships may be stated in the papers applying for or selecting guardians.
- *Naturalizations*: Although the amount of detail will vary over time and place, naturalization records in general are rich in genealogical detail such as dates and places of birth, occupations, and relationships among family members. Be sure to note the witnesses on these records; they are often kin.
- *Bonds of all types*: From bastardy bonds to marriage bonds to court bonds to official bonds, those signing bonds as sureties were often kin, and the higher the amount of the bond, the likelier it may be that a surety was a relative.

Types of Land Records We Might Use

Land records are also often rich sources of genealogically-useful information. All land records—and records of property generally—should be carefully reviewed for clues, including:

- *Land entries and surveys*: Entitlement to land grants may have depended on the number of persons in a household, providing indirect evidence of relationship. Persons filing for entry to land (the first step in obtaining a land grant) or to acquire federal land by purchase or homestead often filed with other family members. Surveyors generally used local area residents as chain carriers on early surveys, and chain carriers were often kin to the person for whom the land was being surveyed.
- *Deeds of all types*: All deed records may contain evidence of relationship, and should be carefully examined. Warranty deeds, selling all rights to land, may

include kin as witnesses. In particular, a quitclaim was often used within a family to clear the title to land. A deed of gift was often used within a family for personal property or enslaved persons.

- *Partitions*: Land could be partitioned—divided among claimants by bequest, intestate inheritance, dower right or otherwise—by court order. Partition applications often indicate the nature of the joint ownership, such as how the land was passed to the claimants, and thus establish relationships.
- *Dower records*: All types of dower records may identify family relationships, and often help distinguish between widows who were—or were not—the mothers of surviving children. Relinquishments of dower, orders of temporary support, applications for dower to be set off and more should all be examined.

Types of DNA Evidence We Might Use

All types of DNA evidence could shed light on family connections. Not all can be used or will be available in a given case, but the options to consider include:

- YDNA testing looks at the kind of DNA that only men have and that's passed down from father to son to son in a direct male line, largely unchanged from generation to generation. So this test can only be done by men (women need to get a male relative to test). It can definitively identify two male testers as related—or not—in the direct paternal line (the father's father's father's line) but can't tell exactly how they're related, or who the common ancestor is. Among the major testing companies, only Family Tree DNA offers YDNA testing.
- Mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) testing looks at the kind of DNA everyone has but that is passed down only by a female to her children, and then only by the daughters to the grandchildren, and so on. So an mtDNA test can be done by anyone—male or female—but results show only whether two testers are related or not in the direct maternal line (the mother's mother's mother's line). Like YDNA, only Family Tree DNA offers mtDNA testing with matching.
- Autosomal DNA testing is the basic entry-level testing done by all DNA testing companies, and looks at the kind of DNA everyone inherits from both parents. Anyone can take this test, male or female, to compare their results against in the testing company database to match up with relatives—cousins near and far. It will identify any relationship up to second cousin (shared great grandparents) for sure, and a wide variety of more distant cousins as well. But because of a random mixing of genes through the generations (a process called recombination), not all more distant cousins will share enough autosomal DNA to be detected as matches.

The Outcome: And Gustavus's mother is . . .

For Further Research

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