

Tracing Her Footsteps - Discovering Female Ancestors

Presented by: Allison DePrey Singleton, MA, MLS
Genealogy Services Manager, Allen County Public Library

Why It's Harder to Trace Women

- Name changes due to marriage or multiple marriages
- Women often recorded under a husband's name
- Few property or legal rights -> fewer records
- Cultural norms left women unnamed or overlooked

Library of Congress. (n.d.). State law resources - American women: Resources at the Library of Congress. <https://guides.loc.gov/american-women-law/state-laws>

Salmon, M. (1986). Women and the law of property in early America. University of North Carolina Press.

National Women's History Alliance. (n.d.). Timeline of legal history of women in the United States. <https://nationalwomenshistoryalliance.org/resources/womens-rights-movement/detailed-timeline/>

Bromfield, D. H. (1987). Women and the Law of Property in Early America. Michigan Law Review, 85(5), 1109-1116.
<https://repository.law.umich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3021&context=mlr>

Strategies for Success

- Use maiden, married, and even prior married names
- Search in husband's, children's, and parents' records
- Create a timeline of her life
- Apply the FAN Club approach: Friends, Associates, Neighbors
- Watch for alternate spellings and nicknames

Key Records to Search

- Marriage records: licenses, bonds, announcements
- Church records: baptisms, confirmations, burials
- Probate: wills, guardianship, widow's rights
- Land deeds, dower rights, grants
- Newspapers: obits, legal notices, social pages

Underutilized Resources

- Community cookbooks, yearbooks, school registers
- Women's clubs, auxiliaries, charitable groups
- Diaries, scrapbooks, photo albums
- Court and pension files with affidavits from women
- City directories

Modern Tools for Research

- FamilySearch.org, Ancestry.com, MyHeritage.com
- Newspapers.com, Chronicling America
- FindAGrave, BillionGraves, Legacy.com
- DNA testing (mtDNA, AncestryDNA, FamilyTreeDNA)
- GEDmatch, Facebook genealogy groups

Online Resources

- PERSI: <https://www.genealogycenter.info/persi/>
- Chronicling America: <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>
- DPLA: <https://dp.la>
- HathiTrust: <https://www.hathitrust.org>
- Internet Archive: <https://archive.org>
- ChatGPT: <https://chatgpt.com/>
- Claude: <https://claude.ai/new>

Women's History Resources

- National Women's History Museum: <https://www.womenshistory.org>
- LOC Women's History: <https://www.loc.gov/collections/women-history/>
- Smithsonian Women's History: <https://womenshistory.si.edu>
- DAR GRS: https://services.dar.org/public/dar_research

The Genealogy Center
www.GenealogyCenter.org
Genealogy@ACPL.Info
260-421-1225