BREAKING THROUGH THE BRICKWALL: 14 STEPS FOR RE-THINKING AND SOLVING GENEALOGICAL PROBLEMS

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1. Identify the problem clearly: Who, where, and when.

2. Re-examine, in detail, all of the evidence you have gathered for that person: census records, family Bibles, deeds, wills, county histories, etc.

3. Create a timeline of known facts.

4. Don't believe all family stories and traditions. Use them only as guides, but they may have kernels of truth.

5. Re-think the spelling of names. Surnames have many variants.

6. Go back to original records and never rely on abstracts (however, don't assume that an original record is always right.)

7. Study known associates of your ancestor and collateral lines, if known.

8. Know the geography and local history of the area where your ancestor lived.

9. Identify possible naming patterns, depending on the cultural tradition.

10. Search everyone with that surname in the region and time period, where practical. Do reasonably exhaustive research. (That includes using Y- and autosomal DNA evidence if possible).

11. Make hypotheses and test them against the records.

12. Keep good notes and fully identify all of your sources along the way.

13. Expect to find records in unexpected places.

14. Resolve any record conflicts and write up the results.

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