

# Success Tips for Using FamilySearch.org

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We all like tools and resources that are easy-to-use, help us quickly find the results for which we are hunting—and, did we say, free? As the largest holder of world-wide records with 2.4 million rolls of microfilm, FamilySearch in recent years has taken gigantic strides to bring these records online. Concurrently, volunteers across the world are indexing records for quicker access and over 300 camera and scanner teams across the globe are capturing records digitally.

By default one will search historical records when using the Search feature; however, one can also select options to search Genealogies, the Catalog, Online Books, and the FamilySearch Wiki. Despite the availability of so many online collections, we may still experience searches with too many results, not the right results, or feel like we are searching for a needle in a haystack. This presentation shares tips for using FamilySearch to structure your search in such a way to more likely solve your research problems and enhance your research experience.

## Tip 1—Use Life Event and Relationship filters

Searching with only the given and last name provides too many unrelated results. For example, a search for James Lynch has more than 300,000 results, beginning with page after page of 1940 U.S. census entries. This is frustrating if one is looking for his marriage record in Iowa. After entering his name, select **“Marriage”** from “Search with a Life Event” and enter **Iowa** for the place of marriage and **1855 to 1870** for year range. His 1860 marriage to Ellen Jaquiss is the fifth result. Further, going to “Search with a Relationship” and entering **Ellen** as spouse will show his marriage as the first result.

## Tip 2—Use Residence and Restrict by Records

Often search results will initially come from the 1940 census, then the 1930 census, then the 1920 census, and so forth when you are really interested in results from the 1880 census. Or instead of census results, you see unwanted entries from other record types you are not currently researching or have already researched. One approach is to use “Residence” from “Search with a Life Event” and enter **Appanosse, Iowa** for place and **1880** for year to narrow the search to the 1880 census. Then use “Restrict by Type,” in this case selecting **“Census.”** For James Lynch, this approach renders a single desired result.

## Tip 3—Use Wild-cards \*

The asterisk (\*) is a researcher’s best friend when query responses fall short of expectations. Most wild-cards allow use of the asterisk only after at least three letters have been used; however, FamilySearch permits wild-card use with only one letter.

## Tip 4—Use Wild-cards ?

Name spellings are frequently used interchangeably such as Jamison and Jameson. With popular names there may be many responses with one version of the spelling and separately many responses of the other spelling. Using the question mark (?) in place of a letter such as Jam?son intermixes the Jameson and Jamison responses providing a useful alternative. In the above Tip, you could use the ? at the end of the surname, as in Hoove? so Hooven and Hoover results would appear together.

### Tip 5—Search by First Name Only

On occasion surnames are so severely miswritten or misindexed that searching by surname will never achieve the desired result. Use only the given names of members of the family, especially family members with less popular names—Gertrude instead of Mary. Also enter a residence and year to narrow the desired search. Review the index and image result to verify locating the intended family.

### Tip 6—Use Parent Only Searching

When searches of the target person fail, you can search instead by using “**Search with a relationship**” if the names of the parents are known. Forego any entry for first and last names. In “Search with a life event,” select **Death** and enter the place of death. In “Search with a relationship,” select **Parents** and enter the first and last name of the father and first name of the mother.

### Tip 7—Finding Married Names

It is often difficult to trace a female child from one census to the next because she marries, and without available marriage records, you don’t know her married name. Each of the married names of the four daughters was learned from a single search since the death records of South Carolina are online. Similar to the Tip 6 search, leave the given and last names blank. Search using first and last name of the father and first name of the mother in the Parents fields. Entries appear for each daughter. Finding these daughters with their families in the census was straight-forward with their married names. Also, when you find the death records of children, you frequently learn the maiden name of the mother.

### Tip 8—Use the Source Film Number

Frequently at the end of the online index, an entry will exist for the GS Film Number. This is good news since it means the record was originally microfilmed by the Genealogical Society (GS) of Utah and exists in the Family History Library or can be ordered for use in a nearby family history center. For example, a search for Jehiel Spencer, marriage in Ohio, resulted in a marriage index result for his marriage to Betsy Blackburn on 10 November 1825. The GS Film number from the index is 904,260. Although the image is not online, one can order microfilm 904,260 and within a couple weeks you can have access to it. One suggestion is to call the Family History Center you are considering to ensure they have a working film printer or bring your camera. If the record was originally captured digitally, the GS Film number will not exist. The Digital folder number is not of use in obtaining an offline image.

### Tip 9—Know the Collections that Relate Specifically to Your Research

Using the general search feature is often sufficient; still, there are times when you will benefit from knowing specifically which collections exist online at FamilySearch. One may click on **Browse All Published Collections** under the world map or under the blue Search button. An alphabetical list of over 2,000 collections will be displayed. Selecting one of the regions on the left under Place will provide an alphabetical list of online collections only for that region. Or you can enter a desired location such as Virginia in the upper left search box. At the upper right is a column for Records indicating the depth of coverage. You can find a FamilySearch Wiki article that will provide some idea of coverage if you click on the title of the collections and then click on “**Learn More.**” The Last Updated column indicates the more recently updated collections. The camera icon to the left of the title indicates that images are available. If Browse appears in the Records column, record images exist although without an index.

## Tip 10—Browsing Can Be a Blast

An interesting German collection is titled: Germany, Prussia, Pomerania Church Records, 1544-1945. Searching for Christian Selchert provides no matches. Below the Search area for the above collection, you see “View images in this collection” followed below it by the link “Browse through 141,103 images.” Wow, few people have the tenacity to search through so many images. But that is seldom what is required. For example, when you click on “**Browse through 141,003 images,**” two choices are listed—Mecklenburg- Sterlitz or Pommern. Click **Pommern**. Then 26 districts are listed including **Pyritz** which is selected. Then 80 churches are listed from which **Brietzig** is selected. Then two choices based on year ranges are presented: 1811-1833 and **1834-1873** from which the second is selected.

A page selection consisting of 394 pages is provided, which leaves you to decide whether to sequentially click through the Brietzig church records or to search by specific page number. With either method, browsing 394 pages is doable for a desired record. In this case, surprisingly, on the third page was the 23 January 1834 marriage of Christian Friedrich Sellchert to Maria Sauermann. The bride and groom were both 28. His father was Gottfried and her father was Johann. In less than 10 clicks, precious information was learned. And image 41 is the birth record of their son Christian Friedrich Sellchert. In fact, records for the entire family of six children were located from this browse collection.

This set of choices is called way-pointing. This collection was fairly easy to navigate because the records were organized by geography and then chronologically. Other records may be organized alphabetically, such as many U.S. county probate records. So don't shy away from Browse collections.

## Tip 11—Using Partner Sites

Instead of “View Image,” on the index, the message reads: “This image is viewable at fold3.com. By clicking here you will be leaving FamilySearch.org. (fees and other terms may apply) Visit Partner Site.” Yikes! First, be assured that clicking on the Visit Partner Site, in and of itself, will not cause any fees to occur. The experience at each Partner Site is different. In some cases, such as fold3.com, you can gain some sense of what is available by seeing how many pages exist. As a patron, first you know something exists. What you do next is your decision. FamilySearch learned from its focus groups that overwhelmingly patrons wanted to know that records were available, if the decision whether to access the records was left to them.

## Tip 12—Sign In, No Tricks

Online access to records is controlled by unique agreements between providers, such as FamilySearch, and record holders. In some agreements, the record holder stipulated that images of its records can be accessed only by patrons that are “signed in.” Fortunately, creating an account at FamilySearch is simple, and patron supplied information is never used for any purpose other than family history research. Click “**Sign in to see free images.**” If you already have a FamilySearch user account, merely enter the applicable user name and password; otherwise, click “**Create an Account**” above the sign-in area to easily create an account. Once the patron accepts a verification email from FamilySearch, the account is active, and the desired image can be accessed.

### Tip 13—Find, Search and Source from the Family Tree

With a FamilySearch user account, you have free access to “Family Tree” containing research information on over one billion persons. The intent of the Family Tree is to have one instance of an ancestor so if 20 descendants share the same 5<sup>th</sup> great grandfather, each descendant will have access to the same information for that common 5<sup>th</sup> great grandfather with the ability to review and add source material, research proof summaries, photos, documents, and stories that all 20 descendants can use. A user-to-user messaging feature simplifies collaboration. Over time, the reliability of Family Tree will increase as more sources are added and evaluated.

First, use the Find feature to locate any deceased person in the Family Tree (access to living persons is not provided). For example, the name Lorilla Spencer is entered using “**Find**” with a father Charles and spouse Frank. She is the first result. By clicking on her name, a summary card appears indicating the number of sources, memories (photos, stories, and documents), and discussions that have been associated or attached to Lorilla. The Family Tree contains over 10 million user supplied photos, documents, and stories of ancestors.

From the Summary card you can click on “**Tree**” and then in the upper left, select from four different type of tree views: Landscape, Portrait, Fan, and Descendancy. Or from the summary card, click on “**Person**” to see spouse, child, parent, and sibling relationships followed by sources. In the “Person” view, on the right panel is “Record Hints” with suggested specific records about your ancestor that FamilySearch has already identified as likely matches.

Also from the right panel, one can click on “**Search Records**” to conduct a consolidated record search. Eureka! With a single click, search results for Lorilla Spencer include her Iowa birth and three census entries. You can quickly attach each applicable record to the person’s list of sources. You can use the “Watch” feature to be informed of additions and changes for ancestors of interest. While the Tree is great for finding ancestors, it is also great for preserving years of research. One can attach key documents, transcriptions, proof statements, and notes.

### Tip 14—Give Back, Be an Indexer

The blessing of being able to obtain desired search results in only seconds is the result of over 300,000 voluntary indexers. FamilySearch sponsors hundreds of current indexing projects from across the world. Projects range from easy to difficult, so beginners to advanced researchers are welcome to contribute according to their schedules. Be sure to select one of the International projects if you have a foreign language skill. Click on “**Volunteer**” or “**Indexing**” from the home page to find several ways to give back. Click on “**Start Indexing**” and then “**Find a Project**” to get started. Volunteers receive a small batch of records so indexing is easy to fit into one’s busy schedule. Give it a try. You will feel good. Warning: indexing can become addictive!

### Tip 15—Give Feedback

Send your ideas to FamilySearch by using “**Feedback**” located at the very bottom of the home page or use “**Get Help**” at the top of the home page to report specific problems. Be sure to visit the FamilySearch exhibit to share your ideas and to learn more.

Please share these tips to help others using FamilySearch to enjoy further research success.