

50 GOOGLE HINTS, TIPS & TRICKS FOR ONLINE RESEARCHERS

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- 1. REMEMBER THE GOAL OF USING GOOGLE – AIM LOW:** All these hints are provided with one objective in mind: to refine your search results so that your results page is dominated by a few meaningful “hits”, rather than cluttered with tens of thousands of irrelevant results. “Google Gold” is when your total results are fewer than 200 with your ancestors among the first 10 to 20 results.
- 2. SEARCH IN LOWER CASE** - Google doesn’t care, but some search engines are case sensitive: The search terms “*ed james*” gives results for: *ed james*, *Ed James*, *Ed JAMES*, *ED JAMES* and also *eD jAmEs*.
- 3. DON’T SWEAT THE PUNCTUATION** – Google mostly ignores common punctuation (comma, semicolon, periods and hyphens). Your search for *biloxi, mississippi* (with the comma) and your search for *biloxi mississippi* (without the comma) produces the same results. One exception: Google recognizes quote marks: “ ” (see #8).
- 4. VIEW “CACHED” IMAGES OF PAGES NO LONGER AVAILABLE** - Ever received a “404 - This Page Not Found” message? Hit the Back button to return to Google’s search results list. Then click on the unavailable item’s “Cached” link to view Google’s archived snapshot of the long-gone page. Then copy & paste any useful content to a file on your PC (see #41). Alternatively, [www. http://archive.org/web/](http://archive.org/web/) (a.k.a., The Way Back Machine) also archives and provides a search engine for most web pages that no longer exist.
- 5. QUICKLY SEARCH A LONG WEB PAGE** - Stop manually reading through long web pages trying to find where your surnames are hiding. Use your web browser’s “Find” function: Ctrl+F (or for Mac users: Cloverleaf+F) to efficiently search an entire web page by jumping from occurrence to occurrence of the term you want. PDF files (Adobe Acrobat documents) also have a *find feature* using the binocular icon.
- 6. QUICKLY SEARCH WHOLE WEB SITES** - If a promising web site lacks a search box on its home page, you don’t have to manually search each page for ancestors. Google can look at all the pages of a web site in a single search. Example: *site:Rootsweb.com “helen lasher”*. It only works for the *Visible Web*, not subscription sites like Ancestry.
- 7. SEARCH WEB SITE TITLES FOR GENEALOGY SURNAMES** - Google can provide websites whose *Titles* include your surname by using the *All-in-Title* phrase: Example: *allintitle:genealogy lasher* finds sites with the word *genealogy* in the title (across the web site’s top blue band) and in which the name *lasher* appears in the site’s blue title bar.
- 8. SEARCH PHRASES NOT JUST WORDS** - Search for a *phrase* using Quotes (“ ”). Example: searching for *william jefferson clinton* (no quotes) results in 64 million results (like sites with the words *William* and *Jefferson* and *Clinton* located many paragraphs apart) but searching “*William Jefferson clinton*” (with quotes) eliminates 98.5% of irrelevant results making the *Presidential Stuff* much easier to locate.
- 9. AUTOMATICALLY SEARCH SYNONYMS** - Google automatically finds synonyms and derivatives of your search terms. Examples: search for *marriage* to find *married, marry, marriages, love, wed & wedding*. Search for *genealogy* and Google includes results for: *pedigree, family, ancestor, relation, descendant, lineage, forbearers*.
- 10. USE WILDCARD SEARCHES** - Search unknown terms using Google’s *Wildcard Word* (*). Search “*john * adams*” to see John Q. Adams, John Quincy Adams, John Jay Adams in your search results. Use more than one asterisk to represent multiple missing words. *Four score ** years ago*. Google doesn’t support missing characters like, *sm*th*.
- 11. SEARCH FOR MISSING TEXT STRINGS** – Searching for *janesville-wi* produces results with any number of missing words, including, *Janesville, WI, Janesville, Rock, WI, Janesville, Rock Co., WI, and Janesville, Rock County, WI*.
- 12. TARGET TIMEFRAMES** - Set a date range for your searches to exclude recent events. Example: *bradford lasher genealogy Wisconsin 1900..1990* produces a list of web sites that include years (numbers, actually) between 1900 and 1990, inclusive, but omits sites mentioning only dates after 1990 or before 1900.

13. **SEARCH FOR NAMES - BOTH FORWARD AND BACKWARD** - Search names as phrases: forward and backward to also find reverse name listings. Example: search "*helen lasher*" and also search "*lasher helen*" so you don't miss additional relevant results.
14. **FORCE GOOGLE TO INCLUDE "IGNORED" WORDS WITHIN RESULTS** – For speed, Google automatically ignores many common words like *a, the, he, she, how, when, where, if*. Ordinarily this is okay, but *I* and *will* can be meaningful to genealogists. The solution: enclose *I* in quotes: "*george bradford III*" or precede *will* with a Plus Sign (+): for example, *george bradford +will*.
15. **USE MINUS SIGN (-) TO EXCLUDE A UNWANTED RESULTS (same as NOT)** - Exclude irrelevant stuff that crowd-out desired results by using the minus sign (-): Example: adding *-ulysses* to a search for *grant* removes 99.6% of the original 366 million hits. Note: there's no space between the minus sign and the excluded word. Be careful: *-texas* will exclude all sites with the word Texas, including sites that elsewhere may contain your ancestors.
16. **USE "AND" TO GET FEWER RESULTS** – To reduce the number of search results, use the restrictive term: **AND** (always capitalized). Example: *jones AND plano AND texas* produces the same results as *jones plano texas*. Note: the **AND** tool is rarely used, because Google assumes a *space* = **AND**.
17. **USE "OR" TO GET MORE RESULTS** - Expand search results that are too few by using the term: **OR** (capitalized). Example: "*hiram h. Bradford*" **vt OR wi OR mi** will produce results in either Vermont or Wisconsin or Michigan.
18. **SEARCH FOR ALL LIKELY ALIASES** - Don't stop with a search for "*iram a. bradford*". He may have been indexed as *Ira Bradford, Ira A. Bradford, Ira A. Bradford* or other variation. For common surnames, add geographic or time restrictions. For example search using this single long search string for several variations at once: "*ira bradford*" **OR "ira a. bradford" OR "ira allison bradford"** and if too many results, consider adding *chicago 1874..1938*.
19. **TRY THE MARRIAGE COMBO PLATE** - Search husband & wife surnames to increase relevant results, for example: search "*william clinton*" **AND rodham**. Understand that "*william clinton*" alone gives 241 million hits; but by adding *rodham* you eliminate 99.7% of the initial results; the remaining 0.3% of results emphasize the Clinton marriage and family (see # 17).
20. **FIND NAMES THAT APPEAR NEAR ONE ANOTHER** – Google uses the **AROUND** function to find a list of sites that contain two nearby words. Example: search: *bradford AROUND(4) lasher* to find web sites that contain the surname *Bradford* within 4 words of the surname *Lasher*. Note: no space between capitalized **AROUND** and (4).
21. **USE GOOGLE TRANSLATE TO INTERPRET FOREIGN LANGUAGE**- Use <https://translate.google.com> to translate a letter with German text like, *Heinrich Deusterbeck lebte in der Nähe von Lübeck zwischen 1845 und 1893* to English: *Heinrich Deusterbeck lived near Lubeck between 1845 and 1893*.
22. **THE ORDER OF SEARCH TERMS IS IMPORTANT** - Search Engines apply priority to early words in your search string. Example: *smith tombstone rock wisconsin* produces slightly different results than *rock tombstone wisconsin smith*. Place your most important search term (usually a surname) first with modifiers later.
23. **USE YOUR SEARCH ENGINE'S ADVANCED SEARCH FEATURE** - Combine these search techniques into long, complex, but highly relevant search strings either manually, or click on the Advanced Search link at https://www.google.com/advanced_search for preformatted web forms.
24. **DON'T BURY YOUR DESIRED SEARCH RESULTS IN NEAR MISSES** – Unless instructed otherwise, Google includes results that that match only some of your search terms. To find only results with all the terms, use the **all-in-text** function. For example, search: *allinext:edgerton genealogy goodsinger* produces a single targeted result. Note: there are no spaces before or after the colon.
25. **SEARCH USING A LITTLE A.I. (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)** - Get a menu of smart, pre-formatted searches to choose from by filling-in Google's Family Search form at www.rcgswi.org/search-rcgs-site.html.
26. **REPEAT YOUR SEARCHES USING VARIATIONS OF YOUR SEARCH TERMS** – This is crucial: Searching the web is hard work; missing ancestors are often inaccessible - buried on page 200 of your search results. So, repeatedly revise

and refine your search terms and *re-search* (repeat) until you get fewer than 200 hits with highly relevant sites in the top 10 to 20 results.

27. **REPEAT YOUR SEARCHES USING DIFFERENT SEARCH ENGINES** - No search engine has a complete index of the Internet. It pays to use more than one Search Engine. Consider trying www.Google.com, www.Mocavo.com, www.Bing.com, www.Ask.com or www.Yahoo.com.
28. **TRY SEARCHING WITH A META-SEARCH ENGINE** – They're like Search Engines on steroids; they automate the simultaneous search of multiple search engines. The up-side is broad results, but the down-side is limited complexity, because different search engine use different search syntax rules. Still, try using: www.Yippy.com, www.WebCrawler.com and www.DogPile.com. For the ambitious, try the free trial version of www.Copernic.com
29. **FIND RELATED SITES** – Once you find a great site, Google can find other similar valuable sites with related content. Find sites related to a good site using *related:www.lytle-family.com* Note: no space before or after the colon.
30. **LOOK UP ANCESTORS IN A WEB PORTAL** – Portal sites maintain directories of web sites organized by category (e.g., county, state, surname or other). Search Portals (collections of links) for free at www.Linkpendium.com. Explore over 10 million sites from either the Location Resource list or the Surname Resource list.
31. **TARGET ANCESTORS HIDING IN .GED FILES** - Most genealogy programs export family trees as GEDCOMs (.ged file format), so ask Google look for ancestors inside highly relevant .ged files. Example: *filetype:ged bradford lasher*
32. **LET GOOGLE FIND (AND TRANSLATE) FOREIGN LANGUAGE WEB SITES** – In the Google search page click the [search preferences](#) link to include non-English language sites among your results and click, save preferences. Then go to the [Google Translation Tool](#) web site to download a button for your browser that translates 34 languages to English at the touch of a button.
33. **SEARCH GOOGLE BOOKS TO FIND TEXT FROM OUT-OF-PRINT BOOKS** - Google is digitalizing millions of books – many of which are no longer copyright protected and can be searched & freely read online at <http://books.google.com>. Use a *name & qualifier(s)* in the search box: Ex: *“george bradford” plymouth wi* or *“helen lasher” genealogy*. Be patient; this is a multi-step search (find a book, then search within the book).
34. **LET GOOGLE KNOW YOUR MOST IMPORTANT SEARCH TERMS WITH A PLUS SIGN (+)** – Ever-helpful Google often produces results that match some but not all you search terms. Using a plus sign immediately before your most crucial term or phrase requires its inclusion in results. Example: *+“adolph sendelbach” chicago OR “cook county” illinois* makes sure Adolph is in each search result, even if he's in Toledo rather than Chicago.
35. **DON'T LET AN IMPRECISE LOCATION SPOIL A GOOD SEARCH** – When using a geographic search term, use all forms of the location, because the person who posted your information may have used abbreviations. Example: *“clint eastwood” hollywood, OR “los angeles county” OR “los angeles” AND California*. Remember: if you don't search them all, you won't get all the possible results.
36. **USE BLOG SEARCH TO MEET OTHER RESEARCHERS** – Google's BlogSearch was discontinued in 2004, but you can still search of BLOGS (web logs) which are like public postings. Online blogs can be viewed for free at www.blogsearchengine.org. Use a *surname, location limiter* and *genealogy synonyms* in the search box: Example: *bradley fayetteville genealogy*
37. **USE GOOGLE IMAGE SEARCH TO FIND PHOTOS, POSTCARDS & MAPS** - A Google search of Images indexed from web sites can find gold. Online images can be searched at <http://images.google.com>. Use a *surname, location, timeframe* or other qualifier like *postcard* in the search box: Example: *“Janesville, Wisconsin” lithograph*
38. **TRY GOOGLE SCHOLAR SEARCH** - Search historical society papers, journal articles and college thesis for ancestors. Scholarly searches are free at <http://scholar.google.com>. Use a *name* and *location* in the search box: Example: *“alice waite” golden Colorado* .
39. **SEARCH GOOGLE IMAGES FOR PORTRAITS** – to show only faces, first do a standard Google image search from the site www.image.google.com. For example: *portrait “hiram bradford” history* to restrict the images to just older faces. Further improve historic results by clicking *TOOLS*, then limiting image *TYPE* to *Black & White*.

40. **TRY GOOGLE NEWS ARCHIVES SEARCH** - Search historical newspapers for ancestors' announcements, ships, companies, crimes, and events. Limited searches of OCR (computer aided transcriptions) are free at <http://news.google.com/archivesearch>. Images cost \$. Try a *name, location and date restriction* in the search box: Example: *boyd, mobile, alabama 1860..1890*
41. **CLIP AND SAVE VALUABLE WEB CONTENT** - Don't just rely on bookmarking sites. The Web are being updated 20 million times per day; content changes; sites disappear. Use your web browser's Copy (Ctrl+C) & Paste (Ctrl+V) tools to record important content to a text or graphic file on your PC or your Google Drive (free cloud storage) for safekeeping.
42. **CITE YOUR WEB SOURCES** - If web content is not original, cite the original source (book author, title, publisher, publication location & date and page) and also the web page (transcriber's name and email address, web address/URL and date posted). Note if the sources is primary (scanned image) or secondary (transcribed text).
43. **SAVE IT TO Google Drive** – Google's free online (cloud) storage tool (www.Drive.Google.com) lets you file text, images, search results and save them to folders that you can share with others or look-up from any internet-enabled PC or Mobile Phone. Google Drive is useful when researching from a public PC or Library's subscription service. Google Drive requires a free Google account which you already have if you have a Gmail address.
44. **USE GOOGLE TO DEFINE ANTIQUATED OCCUPATIONS, DISEASES OR TERMINOLOGY** – Google allows Define (*define:*) to identify the meanings of words and phrases. Example: search *define: ague* to discover that Uncle Cyrus had fever and shaking chills, or *define: lapidary* to learn he cut & polished stones into gems.
45. **TARGET INFORMATION IN A LOCATION** – Use Google's *location:* function to find web sites (URLs) with in an area. Example, Google: *historical photo OR lithograph location:Janesville*. Note: no spaces before or after the colon.
46. **FIND SITES THAT LINK TO A GOOD SITE** – Often, a great site will have other valuable sites with similar content linked to it. Use Google to find a list of sites linked to a useful site. Example: *link:www.lytle-family.com*
47. **USE GOOGLE MAP'S ADDRESS AND DRIVING DIRECTIONS** – Enter a complete address like *3760 n sycamore st miami fl* into www.Maps.Google.com to get a detailed map (including a high resolution satellite or street view option). Then, in the search terms field, add the phrase *to 3413 ruger ave janessville wi* to get detailed driving directions. Great for locating cemeteries or clicking on local businesses for info (menu, phone # or web site)
48. **USE GOOGLE MAPS' STREET VIEW TO GET SNAPSHOTS OF ANCESTRAL HOMES** – As you may know, Google's camera-equipped cars are circling the US and Western Europe, taking continuous 360 degree photos of neighborhoods. Use www.Maps.Google.com to locate an address. Then click *Street View* to call-up the photo image of the home.
49. **LET GOOGLE ALERTS SEARCH WHILE YOU SLEEP** – 100 million web pages are added, deleted, re-named or have content modified each day. Google Alerts (www.Google.com/alerts) is an automated, online tool that lets you to build complex Google Searches and run that *automatically search just for newly added content* to the Internet. You are periodically alerted by email only of new web info about your favorite sports team, celebrity or your great aunt. Alerts are a neat service.
50. **USE GOOGLE EARTH TO LOOK DOWN ON LOCATIONS** – www.google.com/earth provides areal satellite views of streets, buildings, family farms and cemeteries
51. **TRY GOOGLE VIDEO SEARCH TO FIND TUTORIALS, TRAVELOGUES AND FAMILY STORIES** – Use <http://Video.Google.com> to search for short videos of that can provide cultural or historical context for ancestors' lives and events that they may have witnessed, participated in or been affected by.. Example: search *bodie biography california gold mining* or stories like *kansas land grant diaries* or *immigration ship stories 1880..1900*.