Family History Research–General   Compiled by Brett W. Smith

Basic Research Process

1. **Start with what you have** (personal knowledge, family records, talk to relatives).

2. **Identify what information you don't have.** Organize your data in a way that makes sense for you. You can use PAF or another software package, or pencil or paper. Don't use New FamilySearch for organizing research information.

3. **Select one individual, family, or family name to focus on at a time** (it may be appropriate to make this a matter of prayer).

4. **Work backwards from what you know to what you don't know** (for example, if you remember Grandma Smith died in 1968, her death certificate should give her birthdate and place and her parents' names). Look for one event at a time.

5. **Try to find two or more sources to confirm a date, place, name, or relationship.** This is good genealogical research practice, to ensure accuracy; this is NOT required for submitting names to the temple.

6. **Vital records and other original sources are generally more reliable than records created years after the fact.** Don't just assume that research others have done is correct; you may need to double-check. Sources such as the Ancestral File contain unverified information, and may best serve to give you a starting place for focusing your research into original sources.

7. **Consider as many types of sources as you can find; don't necessarily rely on just one type of source** (family records, information from relatives, family traditions, vital records, bible records, journals, census records, county histories, sources available at the Family History Center, sources available at the public library, obituaries, military records, sources on the internet, and so forth).

8. **If you can't find information on an individual, try looking for his relatives** (for example, a brother's marriage record may tell you names of the parents of your ancestor; or a son's death certificate may tell you the the birth place of the father; or census records may show your ancestor living in his son's household in his old age.).

9. **If you seemingly reach a dead end, it may be time to select another family name to work on.** Listen to your feelings; an ancestor you are not now researching may be anxiously waiting for temple ordinances to be done. If you feel compelled to research a line for which you believe all temple work has been completed, someone was probably missed.

[See also "Get started with family history" at http://www.familysearch.org]

Recording Information

Be consistent in the way you record information.

Names

- Surnames: Use a system to allow you to distinguish between surnames and given names.

Which is the surname?	George Bruce
	Healy Clifford
	Augustine Van Newton
	Marvin Reynold
	Jose Juan ante Portam Latinam Gonzalez
	Espinoza y de Nunez y Sainz y Rodriguez

    Common methods to designate surnames:

    > Capital letters: Peter Daniel SMITH
    > In PAF 5 and on temple cards, separated by / /: Peter Daniel /Smith/

- Nicknames: It is best to use the person's real name, unless a nickname was used enough so that the person became clearly identified by it. If you want to include the nickname in the person's name, write it like "William or Bill" not "William (Bill)" (*A Member's Guide to Temple and Family History Work*, p. 10.)

- Name unknown: DO NOT use "unknown" or similar entries for someone's name; just leave the space blank. If a child's name is not known, record only the sex and father's surname (not boy, girl, child, infant, stillborn, unknown, etc.).

Dates

- For clarity and in order to avoid misunderstandings, write dates in the format of *day month year* (example: 6 Sep 1902). Avoid using numbers for months, and write out the year in full.

    > Does 6/9/02 mean 6 Sep 1902 or Jun 9, 2002?

- If you have more than one date for an event, if you wish to show both dates, you can use a slash or the word "or".

    > Examples: 14/16 Jul 1822; 1878 or 1888; 2 Feb 1839/40

Places

- Write city, county, state, country (smallest to largest geographical divisions).

- Avoid postal abbreviations, which are easy to misinterpret.

Organizing and Documenting Your Research

Before you can get too far in doing lots of research, you need to have some idea of what you are going to do with the information you find. How do you organize it? What do you need to write down? How do you write it down? How do you tell later what you have found and what you are still looking for? How do you know where you found a certain piece of information? How do you judge whether information is more or less reliable than other conflicting information you found?

<u>Organizing</u>

- You will need to have a system to organize things like the following:

      Sources of information
      Original documents
      Photocopies and digital images
      "To do" items
      Correspondence
      Books, microfilms, websites, and other sources checked

- There is no one best system for organizing your research. You should use whatever system makes the most sense to you, and one that you will actually use.

      "Your system shouldn't be so complicated you spend more time filing than doing research." "Organizing Your Family Records," *Beginner's Guide to Family History Research*, Chapter 3, by Desmond Walls Allen and Carolyn Earle Billingsley, http://www.arkansasresearch.com/guide.html.

      Sample systems:

      1. Using file folders (see FamilySearch Guide, "Organizing Your Paper Files Using File Folders.")

      2. Using binders (see FamilySearch Guide, "Organizing Your Paper Files Using Binders (Notebooks).")
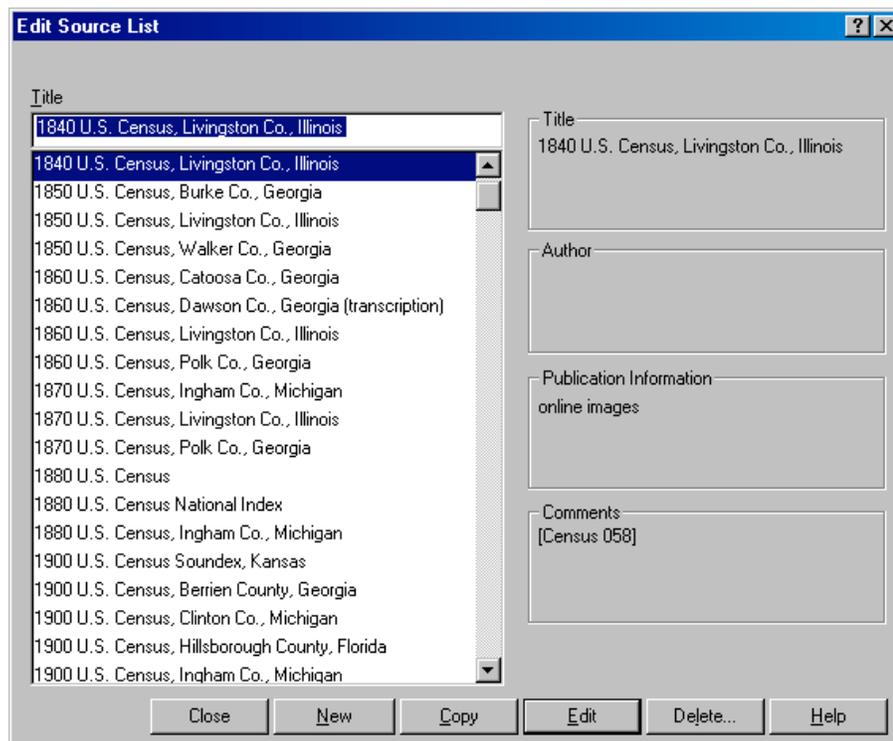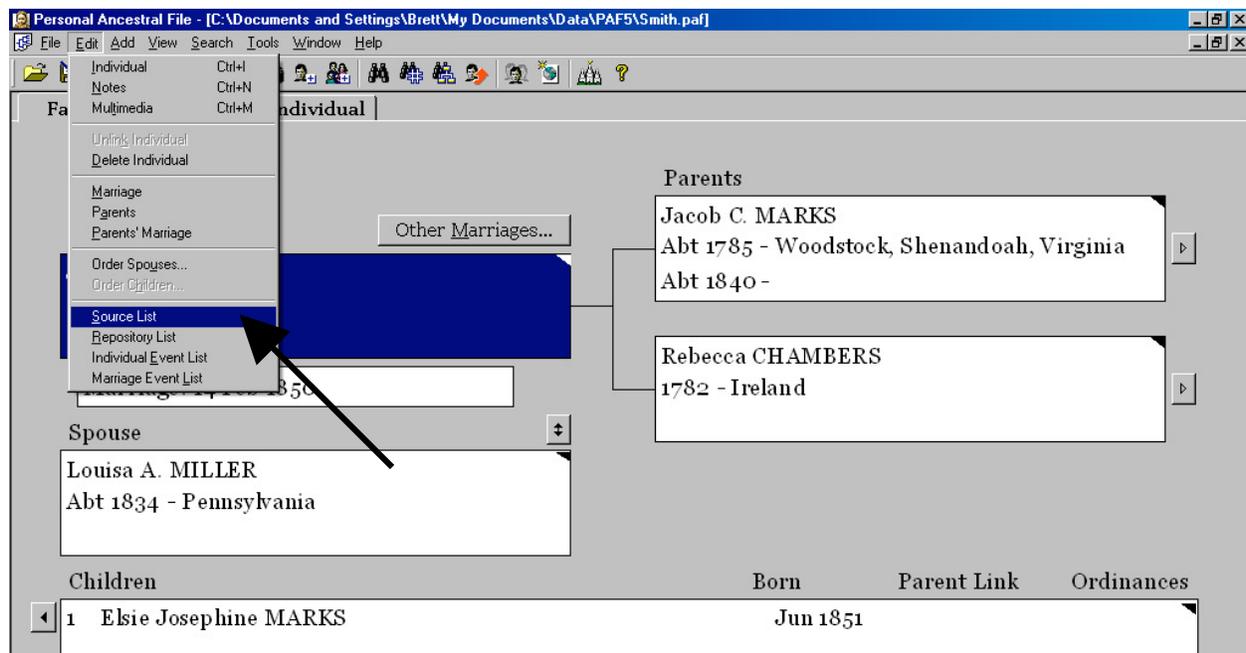
<u>Documentation</u>

- Keep track of the sources you use, so you can tell which information came from which source.

      "Inaccuracy can result in non-valid ordinances and wasteful duplication." (*From You to Your Ancestors*, 3rd ed., chapter 3.)

      Some sources are more reliable than others. Also, you will find different sources may have conflicting information (different birth dates, for example), and you will need to evaluate which piece of information is more likely to be

correct. If you do not keep track of where the information came from, you won't be able to make such evaluations, and you will likely end up reviewing the same source multiple times.

Tracking Sources in PAF

Following is a sample entry for a source in PAF:

Following is a sample list of sources for an individual:

Organizing Your Research

Sample Forms:

Correspondence Log

Date Sent	Addressee's Address	Purpose	Date Replied	Results

Source: http://www.ancestry.com/save/charts/correcord.htm

Research Log

Ancestor's name

Objective(s)			Locality	

Date of search	Location/ call number	Description of source (author, title, year, pages)	Comments (purpose of search, results, years and names searched)	Doc. number

Sample research logs adapted from *Genealogical Research Essentials*, by Norman E. Wright and David H. Pratt (Bookcraft, 1967), pp. 141-143:

RESEARCH LOG

TYPE OF SOURCE OR JURISDICTION: Family and Home

SURNAMES OF INTEREST: Long, Spencer, Paulk

DESCRIPTION OF SOURCE	DATE SEARCHED	EXTRACT NUMBER
Alvin Long family record	1 Jun 2004	A1
Maude B. Long book of remembrance	1 Aug 2004	A2
Personal interview with G. W. Long	3 Aug 2004	A3
Old Temple Ordinance Book of Alvin Long	9 Sep 2004	A4

RESEARCH LOG

TYPE OF SOURCE OR JURISDICTION: Printed Secondary Sources

SURNAMES OF INTEREST: Long, Spencer, Paulk

DESCRIPTION OF SOURCE	DATE SEARCHED	EXTRACT NUMBER
Spencers of New England by A. W. Spencer, 1889	1 Oct 2004	---
Spencer Family in American by S. Long, 1925	1 Oct 2004	C1
Paulk Genealogy by Sara Paulk, 1963	2 Oct 2004	C2
Paulk Family of the South by A. Paulk, 1945	3 Oct 2004	---

RESEARCH LOG

TYPE OF SOURCE OR JURISDICTION: Athens County, Ohio

SURNAMES OF INTEREST: Long, Spencer, Paulk

DESCRIPTION OF SOURCE	DATE SEARCHED	EXTRACT NUMBER
1850 U.S. Census	2 Nov 2004	D1
1860 U.S. Census	2 Nov 2004	---
History of Athens Co. by C.M. Walker, 1868	3 Nov 2004	D2
Grantor Index to Deeds (1839-1890)	4 Nov 2004	D3

RESEARCH LOG		
TYPE OF SOURCE OR JURISDICTION: Military Records		
SURNAMES OF INTEREST: Long, Spencer, Paulk		
DESCRIPTION OF SOURCE	DATE SEARCHED	EXTRACT NUMBER
Revolutionary War Pension Files Index	5 Nov 2004	---
Civil War Index (North)	5 Nov 2004	E1
Consolidated Index to Confederate Veterans	5 Nov 2004	E2

Final Thought on Doing Research

<u>Rely on the Spirit</u>.

"Don't forget the powerful influence the Spirit can have in helping you to identify your ancestors. As you exercise faith, names and information thought to be unavailable may come to you in unexpected ways and places. If you are not now able to find information about an ancestor, be patient. In the meantime, ask the Lord to direct your attention to other ancestors whose information is more accessible." (*A Member's Guide to Temple and Family History Work*, p. 4.)