

***Be a Power Searcher:
Genealogy Research Using Clayton's Online Databases***

General database tips

1. Every database is different, and every search engine has its own characteristics. Take the time to read the "how-to-search" page for the database you are searching - you'll find all sorts of useful tips. Many sites have a global search feature which is handy but should not be relied upon exclusively.
2. Remember that online sources represent only a small part of the total available data. Every search you undertake, whether online, at a library, or in an archive, should happen for a reason: given that you know your ancestor lived in a certain place and time period, you should expect to find certain types of records. Knowing what you are searching for - and why - helps tremendously when navigating the peculiarities of different search engines and databases.

Using Ancestry Plus

1. Ancestry's databases come from a wide variety of sources. Each database is different. Therefore, you can maximize the potential of each database by using the search engine for that particular database instead of relying on the global search. Also, read the fine print - many databases are incomplete (example: WWI draft registrations).
2. Clicking on the "advanced" link next to the global search box takes you to a page where you can select either a category (ie census) or a state. This will take you to the advanced page for that category or state, where you will find links to many individual databases and also to how-to's, maps, etc. that are well worth exploring.
3. In most cases, Ancestry will give you the option of a Soundex or Exact search for names. But you can also truncate. Set the search to "exact" and type the first few letters of the name (you need at least 3 letters), then add an asterisk (*).
4. **Ancestry Plus is only available at the library** - but you can access it from any Houston Public Library location. Ancestry Plus is affiliated with Ancestry.com, which offers the same databases through individual subscription. You must be an Ancestry.com subscriber to search the databases from home, but most of the help features - maps, how-tos, tutorials, etc. - can be accessed free through the Ancestry.com page.

Using Heritage Quest

1. Heritage Quest can be accessed from your home computer via the library's databases page. HQ has two main sections: Census and Publications. Each section is quite different in the search capabilities and use. However, the Notes feature is available in both sections.
2. When searching for census records, keep in mind that the name search is exact spelling only. Use the Advanced Search page to search by first name, birthplace, age range, or whatever when a surname search is unsuccessful. Choosing the Print option gives you a citation but the print may be fuzzy. We have had best results by choosing the Download option, downloading as a TIFF file, and then printing.
3. The Publication section offers searching by name, place, or publication. Truncation and boolean searching is available; take the time to read the Help screen to find advanced search tips. Name and place searches are both full-text searches of the scanned pages; sometimes they work but often not very well. The Search by Publication feature allows you to browse by title. Clicking on the Search link at the left of the title browse page will take you to an advanced search screen. This is the best way to find a family history; use the Subject Search box at the bottom of the screen and enter "Smith Family" (or whatever your surname is) to find a published genealogy.
4. There is a Notes feature in HQ that allows you to attach a personal note to an item you find in HQ. The note is attached to a citation. Notes can be printed or emailed, but they go away when your search session is ended. It's a nifty tool that can help you to document your sources as you find them.

Accessing Databases from Home

For the most up-to-date info on how to access HPL's online databases for genealogy research, click on the link at Clayton's webpage:

<http://www.houstonlibrary.org/clayton>