

Planning a Genealogical Research Trip to Rock County, Wisconsin

FOCUS ON PRIORITIES - The most important thing you could do is spend time in advance of your trip targeting specific research objectives - particularly, which surnames, which record types and which timeframes. What you want determines where you visit. Write these items down and use this page as your constant guide. On this same page, include the list of known surnames and given names for quick reference. I include married women twice; under maiden and married names, e.g.:

Rock County Research Visit Constant Guide

Research Objectives:

1. Photograph tombstones of Frederick H. Waite family
2. Identify parents of Fred D. Lasher
3. Obtain marriage certificate of Alice Waite and Frank I. Bradford
4. Obtain death certificate of Fred D. Lasher
5. Copy probate records of George and Helen Lasher-Bradford

Surname List:

BRADFORD (Alice, Caroline, Frank, George H., Ira A., Willard I.)

LASHER (Agnes, Fred D., Helen, Donald, Zelda)

WAITE (Alice, Frederick H., George B., Samuel, William F.)

PLAN AHEAD - Get a running head start by researching these surnames online and from published indexes, so that you come to the Library, Archive, Court House or Cemetery with an efficient research plan already in hand. Otherwise, your limited time is wasted by randomly walking cemetery grounds, manually scanning old birth, marriage, or death logs or searching roll after roll of newspaper microfilm.

SCHEDULE YOUR DAY & DON'T SLEEP – Check the hours of operation of each of your records repositories and schedule your stops to make best use of your time. Call ahead to smaller repositories – some close seasonally or are open only for scheduled appointments. Depending on funding, public libraries are open much later some days than court houses, so start with the courthouse and end with the libraries. Each night in your motel room, assemble, annotate and reconcile your daily research results, then review the next day's campaign.

GOOGLE MAP YOUR ROUTES – Included below are the addresses of each of the major repositories. Use Google Map (www.maps.google.com). From here you can plan your stops, plot your routes and find hotel and restaurant accommodations.

RESEARCH ONLINE FIRST- The most comprehensive list of online genealogy links for Rock County is found at the Rock County Genealogical Society (RCGS) web page entitled: *Rock Research Strategy and Tools*. See it at:

www.rootsweb.com/~wircgs/Strategy_and_Tools.html. This web page is essentially a Rock County genealogy portal which contains over 80 clickable links to other web pages with content relevant to Rock County researchers.

MAKE FRIENDS - Make a connection to someone in Rock County or elsewhere who shares your surname research interest. Amazing research strides can be made with this step alone. The RCGS Members' Ancestral Surname Page lists 1,000 surnames and researcher contact information: www.rootsweb.com/~wircgs/RCGS_MBR_SURNAMES.html

Another Researcher Surname List (RSL) is found on RootsWeb's web site. It is a searchable index of Surname Researchers and their email contact information. Add your surnames to the RSL and then contact the researchers who share your interest. When you search the RSL, you can geographically restrict results to WI. Surf the RSL at: <http://rsl.rootsweb.com/#search>.

Phone a potential cousin. Check the phone book for surviving descendants in Rock County. Use www.WhitePages.com to see if anyone with your family name remains in the area. Leave the "first name" field empty and search your surnames in *Janesville* and *Wisconsin*. From the results page, use the "Include surrounding area" feature to cast a wider net across all of Rock County. "Cold Calls" to distant cousins is not for the faint of heart, but it can be very rewarding. Older "cousins" often have exclusive knowledge, family bibles, photo albums and heirlooms, but are the most wary about phone scams. If I am calling a Waite home, I start with, "Hello, my name is David Bradford, and I think we might be distant cousins through my father's grandmother, Alice Waite-Bradford who lived in Rock County." Don't be pushy, and see where it goes. Compare notes, get referrals to other family members and ask if the family has someone actively involved in family history research. If they are receptive, tell them you are planning a research visit and invite them to lunch in a public place.

USE AN INDEX – Indexes were painstakingly abstracted by Society volunteers from stacks of original records. An index can quickly and accurately pinpoint an ancestors' records among massive archives or from within hundreds of rolls of Janesville Library microfilm. Otherwise, you are searching for a needle in a haystack. The RCGS offers nearly forty indexes that cover record types from courthouse vital records and newspaper notices (birth, marriage and death) to cemetery indexes and probate records. See the full list of clickable Rock County Genealogy Society indexes at: www.rootsweb.com/~wircgs/index.html#VIEW%20INDEX. Several of these indexes appear online, but in limited form that display only the list of surnames included and the number of times each appear in the full index. Viewing limited version indexes allows you to see whether your ancestors' surnames are present before you purchase an index for between \$8 and \$20. The full-version contains surname, given name, dates and specific record references. See the full list of RCGS published indexes for sale at: www.rootsweb.com/~wircgs/RCGS_PUB.html. Some indexes are also at the Janesville Hedberg Public Library.

KNOW WHERE TO GO – Are you focusing on church records, biographies, deeds, obituaries, probate records or vital records? Each is found in a different location:

Church records are found in a variety of locations. To find ancestors' denomination check biographies, obituaries, family bibles and memorial service cards. Remember, though, for farmers located in the hinterlands, church attendance may have had more to do with church proximity than religious preference. Some old churches still exist and have their records, some sent records to their regional or national headquarters, others were donated to local Historical Societies - and some were discarded or lost to fire. Call ahead and ask.

Historical Biographies often list family members' names, occupation or farm location and acreage, religious denomination, political affiliation and society memberships. These books are found in Janesville's Hedberg Public Library (<http://hedbergpubliclibrary.org>). Search the online catalog for keywords: "*biography, rock county, wisconsin*" to produce a list of books and their corresponding published indexes that you will find in the Genealogy Room of the library at 316 S. Main Street Janesville, WI 53545, (608.758.6588). Several hundred online biographies are also found from links on the Rock County Genealogy Society web site at: http://www.rootsweb.com/~wircgs/Strategy_and_Tools.html.

Deeds and Land Records are located in the Rock County Court House: Rock Co. Register of Deeds, 51 S. Main Street, Janesville, WI 53545 (608.757.5656) If your ancestors arrived early enough to have participated in land grants or original purchase of land from the federal government, then the online BLM records are a great searchable resource with digital images of deeds viewable at: www.glorerecords.blm.gov. Later arrivals may be found in atlas and plat maps for which RCGS also have indexes. Search and view the detailed 1873 plat map online at: <http://freepages.books.rootsweb.com/~wirockbios/1873/AtlasIndex.html>. Current property information is available along with photographs of property from the street at the Rock County Register of Deeds office at: <http://www.co.rock.wi.us/Dept/RegisterDeeds/tapestry.htm>.

Obituaries are a well-indexed source. At the RCGS Publications web page above you will find indexes for different time periods for all the major Janesville and Beloit newspapers. Then, use the Janesville Hedberg Public Library microfilm holdings to quickly find, read and print obituaries and other newspaper references to your ancestors. If you've never used microfilm before, it's easy; just ask the librarian to assist you the first time. The Hedberg Library has an online index of holdings at its genealogy page: <http://hedbergpubliclibrary.org/refgenealogy.php>. Other Rock County Libraries are listed at: www.rchs.us/archives/page66.html.

Probate Records are held at the Rock County Genealogical and Historical Archives located at the corner of N. Franklin St. and Mineral point Ave. in the Wilson King Stone House (adjacent to the historic Tallman House Museum, 440 Jackson St, Janesville, WI). Because there are over 20,000 probate records stored by date of filing (not surname or date of death), a RCGS index is needed - see the RCGS Publications web page address above. The Archives are a must-see resource for local researchers because many other resources are held there including family histories, township records, photo collections and older vital records logs.

Here are the Stone House Archives basics: Admission/Research Fee: free to Society Members, but there is a \$10 per day research fee if you are not a member of the Rock County Genealogical Society or Historical Society. The Archives are available for supervised and assisted research by Society volunteers Wednesday & Thursday, 9 am - 3 pm and Friday, 12 noon - 3 pm. Please call ahead at (608) 752-5891 to make sure we are open on the days you visit. No food, beverage or smoking is allowed. The Stone House Archives are closed holidays.

For information or to request a genealogy research from home, contact: Rock County Historical Society, Attn. Collections Manager, PO Box 8096, Janesville, WI 53547-8096. Archive Research Fees for out-of-area researchers vary depending on membership status, complexity of request and time required to fulfill the request. Non-members and non-profit organizations are charged a fee of \$20 for the first hour and \$10 for each additional hour. A minimum of one hour (\$20) is charged. Society Members of the RCGS or the RCHS, receive prioritized service and limited free look-ups along with research advice if their request can be quickly answered from resources at hand.

Court House Holdings – Most vital records are at the Rock County Court House located at 1 South Main Street, Janesville, WI 53545, (608.757.5660). Their web site is at: <http://www.co.rock.wi.us/index.html>. Here you will find most birth, marriage and death information. These vital records are the primary sources genealogists value most; once you know *who*, *when* and *what event*, for a small fee, the Rock County Register of Deeds can provide you a copy of the birth, marriage or death certificate. But don't expect the Court House staff to do your research for you; you need to arrive with name and a date from a newspaper clipping or a RCGS Vital Records Index (see web site above). Excellent detailed indexes are offered by the RCGS at: http://www.rootsweb.com/~wircgs/RCGS_PUB.html and a general reference index is also provided online by Wisconsin the State Historical Society in Madison at: <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/vitalrecords/>.

Another hint: Rock County residents were sometimes married (or buried) on the other side of the county line. If your ancestor's records aren't where you expect them, consider visiting the county court house of one of Rock's 6 neighboring counties. Young Rock County newlyweds' records may even be found in Dubuque, Iowa where age requirements were lower than Wisconsin or Illinois.

Whitewater Area Research Center - Some older Rock County civil court records have been transferred to UW-Whitewater Area Research Center (ARC) at the Harold Andersen Library of the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. For a list of these records and information on location and hours see: www.wisconsinhistory.org/libraryarchives/arcnet/whitewtr.asp.

The Wisconsin Historical Society (WHS) is one of the top ten collections in the United States and an incredible genealogical resource. They are located on the UW Madison campus at: Wisconsin Historical Society, 816 State Street, Madison, WI 53706. This building houses both the Library (608.264.6535) and the Archives (608.264.6460). Their WHS web site has a genealogy page with many searchable compilations, including digital photo images, obituaries, military records and historical newspaper clippings at:

www.wisconsinhistory.org/genealogy. There are twelve floors of books, pamphlets, microfilm and original materials (bibles, diaries, family histories, military records, etc.), so you must do your homework before arriving. It makes sense to thoroughly search the two online catalogs (library holdings and Archive holdings) before visiting. The WHS ArCat Archive catalog is at: <http://arcat.library.wisc.edu/> and the WHS MadCat Library catalog is at: <http://madcat.library.wisc.edu/index.html>.

CAPTURE, RECORD & RETAIN – Whenever you photocopy a page from a book, also copy the book's title page noting where you found the book, and then staple the two together. Copies of newspaper articles are seldom near the masthead, so handwrite the newspaper name, city, date, page and column number, as well as where the clipping was found in the margin of your photocopy for each article. Record *all* references to your ancestral surnames – even if you don't recognize the given name. You will later find that some of these are family members. Neighboring farmers' surnames on atlas and plat maps may later be discovered to be relatives. Likewise, record or photograph all tombstones adjacent to your ancestors' plots, as some are likely members of your extended family. When using an index, *always* research and write down relevant information for the whole list of people sharing your surname. It doesn't take much time and it will help your research once you get home and begin to assemble the bigger picture.

These steps should make your Rock County, Wisconsin research visit productive and enjoyable.