

CENSUS INDEX SEARCH STRATEGIES

by Randy Seaver

- **USE KNOWN DATA TO DISCOVER UNKNOWN DATA**
 - Work backward in time – use 1920 and 1930 data to find 1910, etc.
 - Note ages, birthplaces, parents' birthplaces, years married, occupations, immigration dates, household relatives, etc. Correlate and use this information to find earlier data.
- **TRY TO NARROW THE SEARCH TO A SPECIFIC STATE OR COUNTY**
 - Use Entire US If You Don't Know Where They Are
 - Use "State" if You Are Very Certain They Are There
 - Use "County" if You Are Very Certain, or Search Each County One by One
 - Use "City" or "Township" if You Are Very Certain They Are There – but you need to know the township or ward naming system in the index.
- **USE CONTROLLED VARIATIONS IN SEARCH PARAMETERS:**
 - Surname (and Alternatives) + Given Name (and Alternatives)
 - Surname + Age
 - Surname + Birthplace (Especially if Out of State)
 - Surname + Age + Birthplace
 - Given Name + Age
 - Given Name + Birthplace
 - Given Name + Age + Birthplace
 - No Name + Age
 - No Name + Age + Birthplace
- **HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD INDEX (HeritageQuestOnline):**
 - Use Search Parameter Variations listed above along with Narrowing the Search
 - Use Age Range, Gender and Race Factors (if applicable)
- **EVERY NAME INDEX (Ancestry.com only) – YOU HAVE MORE NAMES TO WORK WITH:**
 - Start With "Exact Search" rather than "Ranked" or "Soundex Search"
 - Use Search Parameter Variations listed above along with Narrowing the Search
 - Try Spouse's Given Name (especially if more uncommon than husband's given name)
 - Try Children's Given Name (especially if more uncommon than parents' names)
 - Use Easily Spelled Names (more likely to have been spelled and indexed correctly)
 - Use Uncommon Names if Possible (especially if searching a large area, or a common surname)
 - If using an age or birth year, vary it up to 5 years
- **USE WILD CARDS FOR GIVEN NAME AND SURNAME (Ancestry.com only):**
 - Must be at Least 3 Letters, then a *
 - SEA* covers Seaver, Seaner, Searer, etc. But it also gives you Sears, Seals, Seaborn, Seay, etc.
 - MAR* covers Mary, Maria, Marie, Martha, etc.
- **MAP OUT THE NAMES:**
 - Consider Alternate Surname Spellings – Spell it Phonetically, Consider Language Barriers
 - Write out Upper Case Letters and Lower Case Letters in script – what letters might be confused for another?
 - Consider Alternate Given Name Spellings (e.g., initials, nicknames, contractions, middle names)
 - Define Variations in Spelling of the Surname and Given Name – try them.
- **CONSIDER:**
 - Person May be Living With Relatives in a Household – May be Listed Under Relatives' Surname
 - Blended Family May be Listed Under Children's Surnames.
 - Enumerated or Indexed by Given Name Rather than Surname.
 - Enumerated or Indexed with Surname from Previous Household in Census Listing
- **DON'T GIVE UP!! You have a 90% to 95% chance of finding them.**