Brick Wall Special Interest Group
15 March 2022

TIPS FOR USING UNINDEXED COLLECTIONS AT FAMILY SEARCH

Cindy Cruz

from FamilySearch.org

Indexed Versus Unindexed Collections

If no results are found in an initial search, do not assume there are no records about that ancestor on FamilySearch.org. A basic search and record hints are made available only after records have been indexed and become searchable by the computer. More than 70% of the records are unindexed, because Family Search is acquiring records faster than they can be indexed. Digital collections that are unindexed can be browsed to find additional information about an ancestor.

Unindexed Collections

- Are sometimes called "Browse Only" collections
- Also called "Image Only" collections
- Are not searchable by name
- Often contain indices in the microfilmed record books
- Usually contain "waypoints" for navigation
- Require patience, time and effort!
- Can reveal incredible records!

Key to Record Icons on FamilySearch

The camera means images of the collection are available

The camera with a magnifying glass means the collection is indexed and searchable

The camera with a key means the collection is only viewable at a Family History Library or affiliate library

The camera over a webpage means the image is on a Partner Website

The film reel means the record is only available to be viewed as a film in the Family History Library.

Additional Videos for Building Skills:

https://fh.lib.byu.edu/classes-and-webinars/ from Brigham Young University Family History Library

Places

- Places search is an exact search
- As you type, a dropdown box appears and tries to predict the location you are entering
- You must select the correct option highlighted in green in the dropdown menu for it to work

Tips for Browsing Unindexed Images

- **Remember to Create a Free Account and Always Sign In before using FamilySearch!**
- Search for the "Place" (locality) beginning with the largest jurisdiction and drilling down to the smallest. For example: United States, Ohio, Belmont
- Choose the type of records and year range that fits the year range you need. For Example: Land Records, Taxation, Probate, Court, etc.
- Browse forward or backward in an image set using the small arrows that appear on either side of the words "Image xx of xx" in the upper left above the image. The arrow pointing to the right is to advance. The arrow pointing to the left is to go backwards.
- You can also enter an image number and click on "Enter" to advance to that image number.
- To use the tools at the upper right to improve the image quality, click on" Tools" and you will see various options. To adjust the brightness or contrast of the image, use the slider and then click on Apply when the quality of the image improves.
- Images can be downloaded or printed from the upper right icons
- Search in index first, if any, but remember the page number in the index rarely corresponds to the image number of the filmstrip.
- Begin with date of the event (birth, marriage, death) working forward in time. The records are normally in chronological order by the date of the event or of the registration. If the event is not on the date expected, try searching a few years before or a few years after, especially in deed records.
- Take notes or use a research log. Be patient and don't give up.
- Record the collection title, volume, page, filmstrip number and image number for citation and future reference.

Unindexed Collections are often encountered in

- Land Deeds
- Taxation Lists
- Probate Books

Begin by consulting the Research Wiki on the familysearch.org Home Page

- Enter the location into the Search box
- Click on the name of the County, State, (or other locale) you wish to research
- A comprehensive guide for record collections, dates available, repositories, online databases, record losses, boundary changes, etc. will appear
- Many of the listings contain clickable links to the records

LAND DEEDS SEARCH

Deeds are useful for finding the exact location of an ancestor's real estate. They may also contain valuable information about family relationships (ex. wife's name as a grantor, children or grandchildren as heirs, married names of daughters and their husband, relatives as witnesses, FAN Club members as witnesses or owners of adjoining land mentioned in the property description)

- **Sign in**
- From the Home Page, Select Search, then Catalog
- Enter Country, State, County (etc.) and select green highlighted location from the suggestions in the list that appears below the search box
- Scroll down the Search Results to find Land and Property, Click on it
- Find the entry for County Recorder, Click on it
- Look for Deed Index volumes if the icons do not indicate that the collection is searchable
- Read the Instructions, if available, at the top of the page for time-saving tips
- Narrow your search by studying the index volumes for dates covered, grantor vs. grantee indexes, types of documents, etc.
- Click on an appropriate Deed Index for the year range desired (or look for an index in front or back of a Deed Book, if no index volumes are available)
- Look for "Waypoints" in the thumbnail images. These can be book covers or spines, obvious index pages, or blank pages in the books. Some books have keys as finding aids to navigate the index, that are based on initial letters of given and surnames, or on consonant sounds in the surname. Some books place grantor and grantee indexes on the top and bottom of the same page, side by side on adjacent pages, grantees at the front of the book and grantors at the back of the book, or separate volumes for grantor and grantee indexes. Some have only grantee indexes. Each state, county and sometimes even township or city may have different styles of index books and navigation instructions. Note that some books may have several pages with the same number corresponding to the navigation key. (Ex. The surname "Smith," given name starting with "J" may be found on all the pages numbered "176." Then "Smith," given name starting with "K" may be found on all the pages numbered "177," etc.)

- The index will refer to another Volume and Page containing a copy of the deed entry
- Arrow back to the list of Land and Property and find the desired Deed Record book, click on it
- Check the Waypoints and search the thumbnails to find the correct volume and page number. (Some filmstrips contain more than one volume.) Do some mental math to estimate where the page number might be in the filmstrip.
- Images can be adjusted for clarity, printed or downloaded from the tools at the upper right of the image toolbar.
- Record a citation of the document including the State, County, Deed Record Collection, volume, page and image number, taken from familysearch.org and date accessed

TAXATION

Tax lists are useful for year-by-year monitoring of the residence place, real estate holdings, personal property, wealth, occupation, and sometimes even number and type of dwellings, barns, etc. owned by an ancestor. They can hold clues to determine family relationships by proximity or by notes, such as "son of" or "widow of" in the entry, and can sometimes be used to estimate the age of a man when he first appears as a "single freeman over age 21" in a tax roll.

- **Sign in**
- From the Home Page, Select Search, then Catalog
- Enter Country, State, County (etc.) and select green highlighted location from the suggestions in the list that appears below the search box
- Scroll down the Search Results to find Taxation, Click on it
- Look for tax lists created by the County or State, not by individual authors, click to browse
- Tax lists from some localities may be indexed and searchable by name (Yay!)
- Narrow your search by Township, City, etc. as indicated by the filmstrip descriptions, click
- Use Waypoints to guide your search in the thumbnails
- Many tax lists are organized by township or city, year, and alphabetically by surname. It may be necessary to click through the entire filmstrip to find all the entries for your ancestor. Single freemen over 21 years old are often listed in a separate list at the end of the alphabetical list of landowners.
- Many lists contain the name of the assessors, date of assessment, rates of assessment, instructions for appeals, penalties, and other interesting tidbits on the first page of each year's tax list

PROBATE

Probate documents may contain the most comprehensive records available about your ancestor's date of death, family members, occupation, wealth, possessions, family dynamics and even personality. A will may contain the wife's name, the deceased's number of marriages, names of children, grandchildren, sons-in-law, siblings, etc., ages of minor children, descriptions of dwellings and property, wealth, religious beliefs, favored children, family squabbles, enslaved persons and more. It may reflect the "voice" of the deceased, as well. The inventory and vendue (estate sale) lists are goldmines of information revealing everything from wearing apparel to teaspoons to horses owned by the deceased, especially in an era when few other records were kept. The administrator's account often contains payment records for debts of the deceased's purchases and loans, funeral expenses, heirs, court costs, and the names of relatives, friends and neighbors in the deceased's FAN Club. The documents can even provide evidence of preferred language and literacy by examining whether the will is written in English or another language and whether family members signed documents or instead made "their mark." Signatures on original documents can be used for comparison to identify the signer on other documents.

- **Sign in**
- From the Home Page, Select Search, then Catalog
- Enter Country, State, County (etc.) and select green highlighted location from the suggestions in the list that appears below the search box
- Scroll down the Search Results to find Wills and Probate, Probate Court Records, etc. (Collection titles vary, but look for records created by the county. Consult the Family Search Research Wiki to find the name of the probate records for the locality you seek.) Click on the collection title.
- Follow the same general sequence in instructions for "Land Deeds" to find your ancestor in the Probate Index. There may be several indexes; Separate index volumes for Wills, Inventories, Administrator's Accounts, Guardianship, etc. AND an index to Probate Estate Files (Files are nearly always the most comprehensive record containing many or all of the original documents in one place.)
- Follow any finding aids, locate the name in the index, and arrow back to the Probate results page and find the volume and page for the documents listed in the index.
- Probate files or packets may be arranged alphabetically, by case number, by year, or other organization. A single file may contain only a few images or hundreds of images. Again, look for Waypoints in the thumbnails to save time in locating the file.
- NOT ALL FILES ARE ALWAYS IN EXACT ALPHABETICAL ORDER, so do a thorough search!

The same search techniques can be used for other unindexed collections, such as church records, marriages and other vital records, court records, military records, naturalizations, etc.