

## How to Conquer Brick Walls in Family History Research

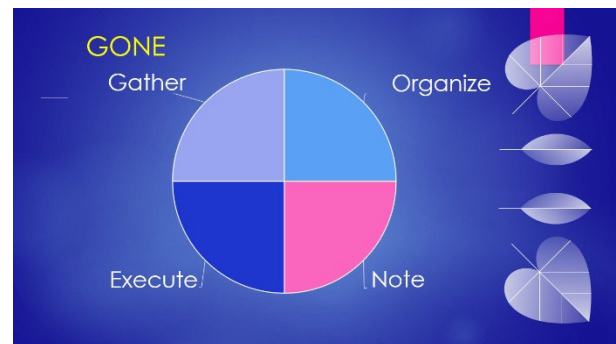
### [Video Link](#)

Have you hit a brick wall in your family tree research? Do not worry, you are not alone! Many genealogists encounter roadblocks along the way. But fear not, we are here to help you conquer those brick walls and continue unraveling your family history.

There is not a brick wall I did not like, bust, crawl under or over. Most of the time, there is a way around that brick wall. If you follow these steps, I will be surprised if in the end, you do not find the answer you seek. Keep in mind that it might not be the one you expect... just say'n.

### GONE

We are going to use this easy to remember acronym to help keep you moving forward. It is GONE. Gather, Organize, Note, and Execute. Learning these research skills will help you say GONE are the days of brick walls... hopefully!



### Gather What You Already Know

The first step in overcoming a brick wall is to review what you already know. Take a close look at the information you have gathered so far and see if there are any clues or connections you may have missed. Sometimes, the answer is right in front of you!



Dig into both your files at home, on your computer, and what you have online (like at Ancestry, MyHeritage, etc.).

Gather All Records Found in Online Platforms

Next it is time to download copies of all records found on Ancestry, FamilySearch, MyHeritage, WikiTree, county libraries, and state archives.



[GenealogyTV.org](http://GenealogyTV.org)



[YouTube.com/GenealogyTV](https://YouTube.com/GenealogyTV)

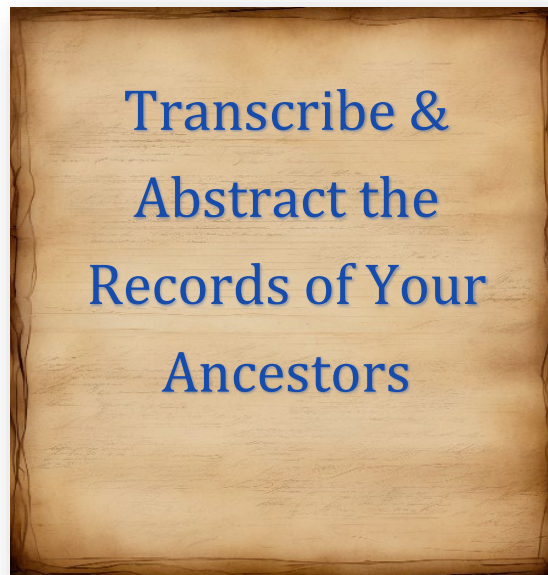
## Transcribe

Transcribe important documents, like wills and court records. You will be amazed at what you learn about your ancestors when you do. You will see details you have never noticed before. Are there other family members named in those documents?

## Abstract

At minimum, abstract the information from all records into your research notes. This is an especially crucial step. Do not skip this one.

See the research notes section for more about them.



## Keeping Organized Keeps You in the Zone

By “the Zone” I mean staying focused on the research question at hand or as you may call it, the brick wall.

I talk about staying organized and so that when I am in the research “zone,” I do not have to lose my train of thought or deep focus on anything but the records, my thoughts, my theories, and not trying to find where I put the records.

Do not feel like you need to clean out the entire closet or attic. But focus on one research question. Find and organize all records related to that topic.



## Research Notes

### **Your Ancestors RESEARCH NOTES are THE MOST IMPORTANT DOCUMENT IN YOUR ANCESTORS FILE!**

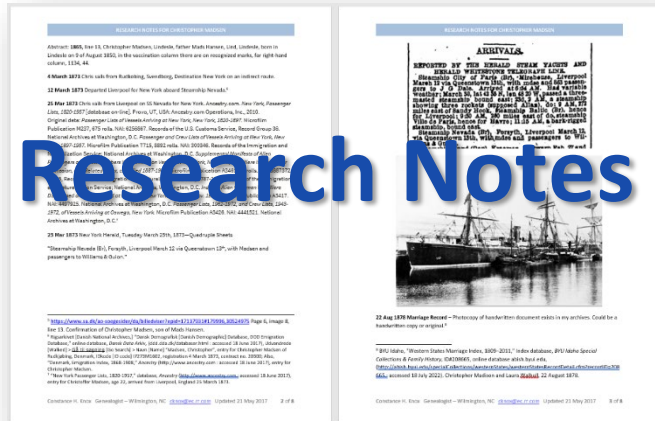
Connie Knox

Keeping proper research notes is a **game-changer**. I promise it is worth the time and effort... ESPECIALLY for brick wall problems.

This is where you gather what you have and organize it into **one document per ancestor with all records found in chronological order!**

By doing Research Notes, it serves many purposes:

- ✓ Creates a timeline of your ancestor.
- ✓ Gives a brief abstract of the information found in each record.
- ✓ Keeps track of your source citations (ideally in footnotes).
- ✓ Becomes your research plan (highlight next research tasks in red).
- ✓ Might become the basis for your family history book should you ever decide to write one.
- ✓ Creates an excellent resource for future generations.
- ✓ Helps to understand migration patterns.
- ✓ Most of all... IT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT DOCUMENT IN YOUR ANCESTORS FILE.



## Geography

Integrating geography into our family history research offers numerous benefits that enrich our understanding of our ancestors' lives.

By examining maps and understanding the historical context of when states, counties, or territories were created, we can pinpoint the precise locations where our ancestors lived, worked, and traveled.

This knowledge not only helps us visualize their surroundings but also provides crucial context for interpreting records and understanding migration patterns. Understanding the geographical landscape allows us to uncover hidden connections



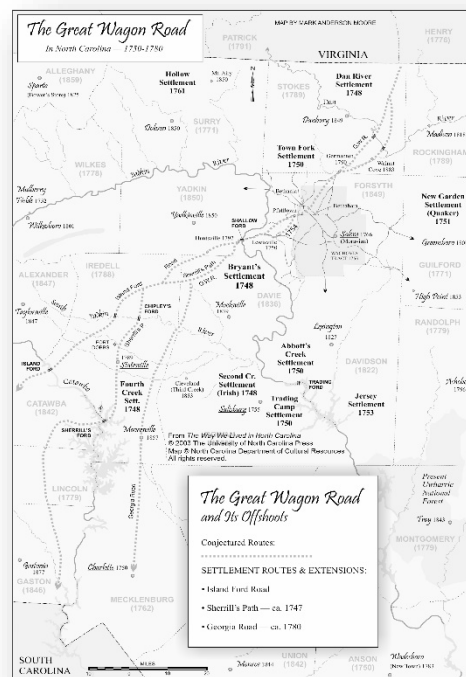
between families, track the movement of ancestors over time, and gain insights into the social and economic factors that shaped their lives. Through the lens of geography, we can piece together a complete and more accurate picture of your family history.

## Maps

Old maps are invaluable resources for family history researchers, offering a glimpse into the past and helping us trace the footsteps of our ancestors. There are several places where you can find old maps:

- 1. Libraries and Archives:** Many libraries and archives house extensive collections of historical maps, including atlases, plat maps, and land ownership maps. Local libraries and state archives are excellent places to start your search. The [FamilySearch Research Wiki](#) can help you find the libraries and archives in the areas you are researching.
- 2. Online Resources:** Numerous websites offer digitized collections of old maps that are easily accessible from the comfort of your own home. Websites like the [Library of Congress](#), [David Rumsey Map Collection](#), and the [US Geological Survey](#) provide a wealth of [historical maps](#) spanning different time periods and geographic regions.
- 3. Genealogical and Historical Societies:** Local historical societies often maintain collections of maps and other historical documents related to specific regions or communities. Contacting these organizations can provide access to unique resources tailored to your research interests. [FamilySearch has a listing](#) of these societies by location.
- 4. Genealogy Websites:** Some genealogy websites also feature collections of historical maps that can be useful for family history research. These maps are often integrated with other genealogical records, making it easy to correlate geographical information with family data.

By utilizing these resources, you can uncover a wealth of geographical information that enhances your family history research and brings your ancestors' stories to life.



1 Great Wagon Road map by Mark Anderson Moore, courtesy North Carolina Office of Archives and History, Raleigh.

## New Research Technologies

Saving the best for last, another useful strategy is to leverage technology. Online databases, genealogy websites, and DNA testing can provide valuable insights and connections that may help you break through that brick wall.

### Full Text Search at FamilySearch

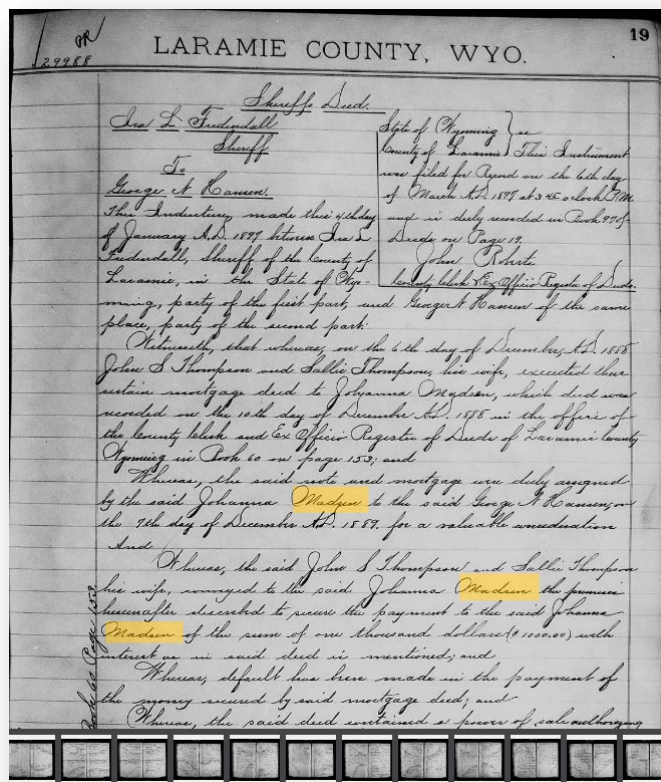
In 2024 FamilySearch.org introduced a new full-text search feature (currently in beta) that could significantly enhance researchers' ability to find handwritten, typed, and unindexed records.

This new feature allows researchers to search within the entire text of documents rather than just indexed fields. This could be particularly useful for uncovering details that may not be captured in traditional indexing, such as specific names, phrases, locations, or events mentioned within the text of historical documents.

Filters allow you to narrow your results by year, location, and more. As of this writing, U.S. Land and Probate, and Mexico Notary records are available.

To learn more about how to use the Full Text Search at FamilySearch, see this video. Click the image to see the video called [“FamilySearch Hidden Records: Full Text Search: 2024.”](#)

It is amazing... try it... And it is free!



## TAKEAWAYS

1. Keep Research Notes – One for each brick wall ancestor.
2. Stay Organized – One ancestor at a time.
3. Research All Records
4. Research the immediate family and FAN Club (Friends, Associates, and Neighbors).
5. Try the new FamilySearch Full Text Search (after watching that video).

Do not be afraid to reach out for help. Joining genealogy forums, attending conferences, or hiring a professional genealogist can provide fresh perspectives and expertise that may lead to a breakthrough in your research.

Remember, genealogy research is a journey filled with twists and turns. Do not get discouraged by brick walls – with patience, perseverance, and a little creativity, you can conquer them and continue building your family tree.

Lastly, consider joining the [Genealogy TV Academy](#). It is taught by me via Zoom and in recorded videos in lessons, handouts, worksheets, and more. We always have a ton of fun.

Happy Researching!

*Connie Knox*

