

Virtual Roots: A Case Study of Techniques for Finding and Using Online Sources

Case History:

Daniel Cook (born 1814 PA, died 17 Apr. 1891 Faribault Co., MN)
m.

Marry Ann Herring (born 1818 PA, died 7 Apr, 1891, Faribault Co., MN)

From her letter: “We started for Minn Apr 8th 1855 and arrived in Minn the 14 of May”

My Goal: Find what resources exist online to flesh out the lives of Daniel and Mary Ann Cook

Vital Records

- Federal Census: 1860: Cooks in Caledonia, Houston Co., MN
1870: Walnut Lake, Faribault Co., MN
 - Ancestry.com (free at libraries, \$ from home)
 - HeritageQuest (available free through FCPL)
 - Fold3.com (\$) (1860 and 1930; more coming) 1860 MN
- State/Territory Census:
 - Ancestry.com (images of many state census)
 - http://genealogy.about.com/od/us_census/f/state_census.htm (list of state censuses)
 - <http://www.researchguides.net/census/state.htm> (links to online state resources)
- Mortality Schedules
 - Ancestry.com
 - <http://www.mortalityschedules.com/> - good articles
- 1890 Veterans & Widows Census – Ancestry.com
- Most birth, death, marriage records are filed at the county level: <http://www.vitalrec.com/>
- Church records (baptisms, marriages, burials)
- Tombstones (free images & info) – www.findagrave.com; <http://billiongraves.com>; Virtual Cemetery (http://www.genealogy.com/genealogy/VG/vcem_search.html), individual cemeteries
- Online Death Indexes: <http://www.deathindexes.com/>
- Tax records
 - Usually filed in county courthouses with a duplicate sent to state/colony

Remember: There are **two distinct sets of census records** ~ Federal and State/Territory

Books: Check national sites (free and subscription), state sites, and county sites!

- Google (free)
 - Search for a free downloadable version first on Google. Click on “see other formats” and click on “PDF,” then save it to your hard drive because it may disappear. I found two histories on Faribault Co., both free, but none for Houston Co.
- Google’s “Advanced Book Search”:
http://books.google.com/advanced_book_search
 - If a “Full Text” version appears when you click on it, click on “See Other Formats”
- Internet Archive (free): (<http://www.archive.org/index.php> – click on “Texts” then do a keyword search
 - When you find a book you want, click on it, then click on “PDF” and let it load, then save a copy to your hard drive. *OR* you can just read it online. You may want to first click on “Full text” and search for the name or location of interest, but understand this is an OCR copy and about 5% of the letters are not correct so your search may not be exact. Then you can go back to the PDF version.
- Ancestry.com (\$)
 - <http://search.ancestry.com/search/Default.aspx?cat=33> to go directly to a specific title or collection (under “Stories, Memories & Histories”). Search for your family from this

Remember: There are **national sites, state sites, county sites, historical societies and university sites!**

- search screen for published books, or scroll down to “Go Directly to a Specific Title or Collection”). Or start from <http://search.ancestry.com/search/>
- When you find a book listing your ancestor, do a name search within the book and you will get highlighted page results. Pay attention to all of the neighbors, related families, etc.! Use alternate spellings!
- Check the Family History Books in Family Search’s archive of free books (includes the Allen Co. Public Library, BYU, Family History Library, Houston Public Library, and Mid-Continent Public Library) (https://books.familysearch.org/primo_library/libweb/action/search.do?vid=FHD_PUBLIC)
- DAR Library catalog at <http://www.dar.org/library/onlinlib.cfm>
 - Don’t forget GRC records (http://services.dar.org/public/dar_research/Search/default.cfm?myaction=acknowledge&=Enter)
- Library of Congress catalog at <http://catalog.loc.gov/>
- Search for state, university, and local repositories!
 - 1,000 PA books are online through the University of Pittsburg, fully searchable: <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/p/pitttext/> (use “Advanced Search”)
- Surprise! Not all books are online! Use WorldCat to search for terms, names, locations (<http://www.worldcat.org/>; click on “Advanced Search”) *Note: It does not index DAR Library.*
 - You need to create an account (free) to save your hits (I had 469 on a search for Houston Co., MN, which included biographies, probate records, tax Records, naturalization records, warrant registers in everything from the Library of Congress to a local historical society)
 - Once you have your list of hits, check the ones you want to save under “My Saved Searches” and it will save only those entries you want to check. You will find where it is located and whether it is available on microfilm or through interlibrary loan.

Articles:

- PERSI (The Periodical Source Index) is the largest subject index to genealogical and historical periodical articles in the world. You can order copies of these articles relatively cheaply (home page is <http://www.genealogycenter.org/Services.aspx> and the order form is at <http://www.genealogycenter.org/pdf/ArticleRequest.pdf>; charge for articles is \$7.50 for processing up to 6 articles plus \$0.20 per page sent to you). The time period of the articles ranges from the 1700s to the present.
- Access PERSI at home through HeritageQuestOnline through Fairfax County Libraries then “HeritageQuest Online” and sign in using your library card number. Then click on PERSI.
 - Unfortunately, only names in the titles are indexed. [i.e., After I learned my Herring and Armstrong families were in Caledonia, Houston Co., MN in 1855, I searched PERSI for “Herring” and “Armstrong.” I found an article “Armstrongs, Haight & Herrings” with a wealth of information in the obscure journal *Caledonia Pride*, but it only came up for Armstrong, not for Herring or Haight]

Newspapers (obituaries, weddings, some births, providing context)

- Library of Congress’ “Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers” (also called “National Digital Newspaper Program” or *NDNP*):
 - <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/> and <http://www.loc.gov/r/news/>
 - <http://www.loc.gov/r/news/oltitles.html>
- Library of Congress – go in person since most newspapers have not been digitized!
- ICON (International Coalition on Newspapers): <http://icon.crl.edu/digitization.htm>
- Penn Libraries “Historic Newspapers Online” (listing for all states) <http://gethelp.library.upenn.edu/guides/hist/onlinenewspapers.html>
- U.S. News Archives: <http://www.ibiblio.org/slanews/internet/archives.html>
- Footnote.com has some (mostly 20th century newspapers)

- GenealogyBank.com (\$70/year; \$9.95/mo) – Search for potential titles before you sign up (<http://www.genealogybank.com/gbnk/newspapers/sourcelist/>)
- WorldVitalRecords.com (\$90/year) says it has added NewspaperArchive.com to its site, but I got very different hits when I searched –I got the 1918 obituary for my grandfather and his funeral details on GenealogyBank but the *Pueblo Chieftain* images are not posted on WorldVitalRecords.com. However, WorldVitalRecords has many more databases.
- Ancestry’s “Historical Newspaper Collection”
<http://www.ancestry.com/search/rectype/periodicals/news/default.aspx>
- Worldwide digitized papers: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_online_newspaper_archives
- Index to Digitized British and Irish Newspapers:
<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~dutilleul/BritishandIrishNews.html>

Land Records: Don’t forget the context of the purchase (who else was involved, why did they come, what was happening in their neighborhood, what did they do when they lived there, when did they move on and why, did they leave some family behind?)

Remember: There are two distinct sets of land records—county & state/federal

- BLM: For **Public Land States** (30 states whose land was never claimed by the original 13 colonies or their proprietors; this land was surveyed into rectangular plats through township/range/section). Land was granted to homesteaders, bounty land given for military service,
<http://www.gloreCORDS.blm.gov/search/default.aspx> (but use this as a **starting** point: The date of Daniel Cook’s patent online was 5 Nov 1874, but when I got the file in Springfield, I found out that he had settled here 29 Jul 1864 and has “built a frame house thereon 16 X 22 feet square with ell 12 X 12 feet 1 ½ stories high, shingle roof 7 doors 7 windows and 2 floors.” He had plowed and “cultivated 65 acres, built a stable and granary, dug 2 wells and planted one acre of forest trees.” Some patents show proof of military service and their unit.
- Arphax Publishing (\$20 for 3 mo, \$60/yr; www.arphax.com and www.historygeo.com) is publishing many volumes based on BLM info and has an **excellent** “First Landowners Project”
- For **State-Land states** (covering the other 20 states—the original 13 colonies, plus Vermont, Kentucky, Tennessee, Maine, West Virginia, Texas, and Hawaii), the earliest records are typically (but not always) on file in the state capital. These tracts were usually surveyed by metes-and-bounds. These are much harder to locate.
 - Virginia/WV: http://lva1.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/F/?func=file&file_name=find-b-clas30&local_base=CLAS30
 - Maryland: <http://guide.mdsa.net/viewer.cfm?page=landrecords>
 - Kentucky: <http://www.sos.ky.gov/admin/land/resources/Pages/default.aspx>
 - Pennsylvania:
 - <http://ancestortracks.com> (publisher of books (\$); **free** downloadable maps)
 - http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/land_records/3184
 - Check county sites for deed holdings; hardly any are online
- Atlases: David Rumsey Map Collection, Family History Archive, plat books (search online)
- Overlay maps onto GoogleEarth; use EarthPoint at <http://www.earthpoint.us/townships.aspx> (basic use is free) to enter the legal description from the patent and then view the result in Google Earth. You should be able to see the township and county it is in
- Ancestry has an extensive collection of atlases and plat maps, many of which have been indexed (<http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=1127>). Or you can browse to search the counties (<http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=1205>)

Military:

- Overview of links (both free and commercial) to online military indexes and records for all wars and all wars: <http://www.militaryindexes.com/> (excellent!)

Remember: States and the Federal Government have military records & pensions

- By state, go to <http://www.linkpendium.com/genealogy/USA/> and click on the state, then the county, then scroll down to “Military Records and Histories”
 - National Archives: <http://www.archives.gov/research/military/index.html>
 - <http://aad.archives.gov/aad/series-list.jsp?cat=WR25,26,27,28,42,43>
 - War of 1812: <http://www.archives.gov/research/alic/reference/military/war-of-1812.html>
 - <http://www.loc.gov/r/program/bib/1812/>
 - The War of 1812 website: <http://www.warof1812.ca/>
 - Civil War:
 - *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (128 volumes)*; also see link to accompanying atlas): <http://ehistory.osu.edu/osu/sources/records/>
 - Dyers Compendium: <http://www.civilwararchive.com/regim.htm>
- ❖ Here’s a chart from Ann Fleming which gives the birthdates of soldiers who served in various wars. If your ancestor was born in the “Birth Years Range,” consider that he (or she) may have served in the relevant conflict:

BATTLE	CONFLICT DATE	BIRTH YEARS RANGE
American Revolution	1775-1783	1720-1774
War of 1812	1812-1815	1762-1800
Indian Wars	1817-1898	1767-1885
Mexican War	1846-1848	1796-1835
Civil War	1861-1865	1810-1852
Spanish American War	1898-1899	1848-1887
Philippine Insurrection	1899-1902	1849-1889
World War I	1917-1918	1871-1899
World War II	1940-1947	1890-1930
Korean War	1950-1955	1900-1938
Vietnam	1964-1975	1914-1956

General:

- Portals to digital records posted by states: <http://blogs.loc.gov/digitalpreservation/2013/09/71-digital-portals-to-state-history/>
- The amazing volunteer (thus free!) USGenWeb Project (<http://usgenweb.org/index.shtml> and <http://usgenweb.org/projects/index.shtml>). The comprehensiveness of each site depends on the aggressiveness of the state and county coordinators. Links may include digitized & indexed books, maps, family group sheets, military records, obituaries, etc. Don’t miss this site!
- RootsWeb (<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/>) is an outstanding, *free* compendium with message boards, surname projects, articles, charts, etc.
- Linkpendium: <http://www.linkpendium.com/genealogy/USA/> (comprehensive - don’t miss this site!)
- Barbara Renick’s list: <http://www.zroots.com/books.htm>
- Distant Cousin: <http://distantcousin.com/States/>
- Random Acts of Genealogical Kindness: http://raogk.wikia.com/wiki/Random_Acts_of_Genealogical_Kindness_Wiki
- Cyndi’s List of Societies & Mailing Lists: <http://www.cyndislist.com/society.htm>
- Cyndi’s List of Surname Associations: <http://www.cyndislist.com/surnames.htm>
- Family Search Labs: <http://labs.familysearch.org/>
- Affinity groups (like the DAR or “Descendants of Mexican War Veterans” to Andersonville Survivors Association)

Societies:

- Directory of Genealogy Libraries in the U.S. – http://www.gwest.org/gen_libs.htm
- State Archives Directory - <http://www.archives.gov/research/alic/reference/state-archives.html>
- Online U.S. State and Local Historical & Genealogical Societies - <http://www.usgennet.org/socadmin/>
- Manuscript Collections – held by universities, historical societies, libraries, etc.

Queries:

- GenForum: <http://genforum.genealogy.com/> - family forums can give excellent leads, contacts
- <http://www.cyndislist.com/queries.htm>