

Searching

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Charlestown Genealogy Club
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We will cover

- Genealogy Search Strategies
- Practical Techniques for Finding Your Ancestors
- Searching Tips for All Skill Levels



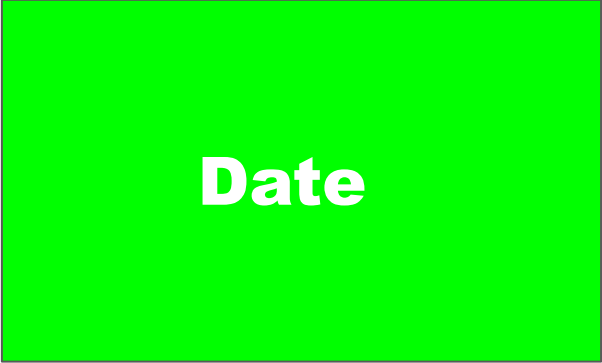
Search Foundations

- Know your research goal before you search
- Start with what you already know
- Keep a research journal of what you've tried or make notes in your genealogy software or file
- Be flexible when discoveries lead you in new directions

The Big Four

A solid red rectangular box.

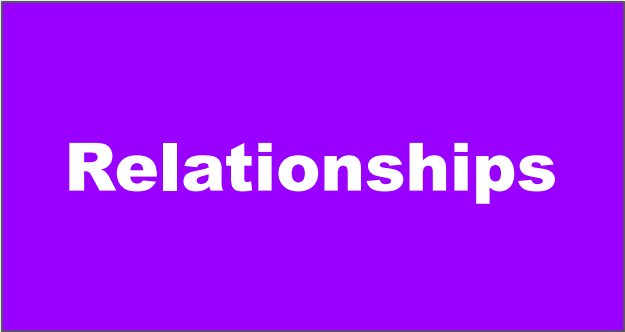
Name

A solid green rectangular box.

Date

A solid blue rectangular box.

Place

A solid purple rectangular box.

Relationships

Handling Name Variations

- Old records show many spelling variations
- Try alternative spellings in searches (Smith, Smyth, Smythe)
- Use wildcards (*) for partial matches (Sm*th finds all)
- Try maiden names and nicknames (Maggie for Margaret)

Wild Card & Advanced Operators

Expand your Search

- * = any letters (Sm*th)
- + = must include word

Narrow your Search

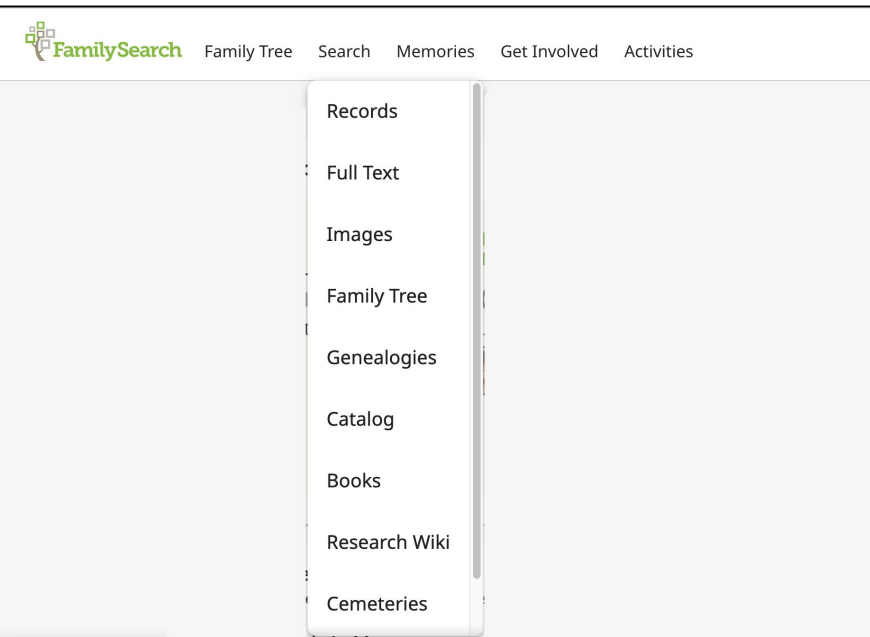
- - = exclude word
- "" = exact phrase

[Google List of 44 advanced search operators](#)
[Microsoft search operators](#)

FamilySearch Search Tips

- Full-text be sure to use “” around names, multiple versions,
E.g., John Adams, John Quincy Adams
- Full-text search finds ancestors in unindexed documents
- Search by location first when names are common
- Collections vary – use the right one for your ancestor’s era
- Be critical about results - look for corroboration

Searching in FamilySearch example



Use the various options under Search, starting with Records

A screenshot of the FamilySearch search interface. It features four input fields: 'First Names', 'Last Names', 'Birth Place', and 'Year'. The 'Birth Place' field has a placeholder text 'City, County, State, Province, or Country'. The 'Year' field has a placeholder text 'Birth or Death Year'. Below the input fields is a yellow 'SEARCH' button with a magnifying glass icon and a 'MORE OPTIONS' link.

First Names	Last Names

Birth Place	Year
City, County, State, Province, or Country	Birth or Death Year

[MORE OPTIONS](#)

FamilySearch Record

FamilySearch

Family Tree

Search

Memories

Get Involved

Activities

📍

🌐

?

💬

🔔

Hope Tillman

Records

Full Text

Images

Family Tree

Genealogies

Catalog

Books

Wiki

Name	Events	Relationships
Lydia Starbuck Principal Massachusetts, Births and Christenings, 1639-1915	Birth 15 September 1704 Nantucket, Nantucket, Massachusetts, United States	Parents Jethro Starbuck, Dorcas Gayer
Lydia Starbuck Barney Principal Find a Grave Index	Burial Nantucket, Nantucket, Massachusetts, United States of America Birth 15 September 1704 Death 2 April 1751	
Lydia Starbuck Principal Massachusetts, Births and Christenings, 1639-1915	Birth 25 December 1770 Nantucket, Nantucket, Massachusetts, United States Death 16 March 1771	Parents Nathaniel Starbuck, Eunice
Lydia Starbuck Bride Massachusetts, State Vital Records, 1638-1927	Marriage 18 June 1757 Nantucket, Nantucket, Massachusetts Bay Colony, British Colonial America	Spouses Joseph Clasby
Lydia Starbuck Bride Massachusetts, State Vital Records, 1638-1927	Marriage 29 October 1761 Nantucket, Nantucket, Massachusetts Bay Colony, British Colonial America	Spouses Theophilus Pinkham
Lydia Starbuck Mother Massachusetts, Births and		Spouses Benjamin Barney Children Eunice Barney

Feedback

Search

×

Add Ancestor Information

NAME [ALTERNATE NAME](#) [SEX](#)

First Names

lydia

Last Names

starbuck

Add Life Event

[BIRTH](#) [MARRIAGE](#) [RESIDENCE](#) [DEATH](#) [ANY](#)

Birth Place

Nantucket, Nantucket, Massachusetts, Unite

Birth Year (Range)

From

To

Place

City, County, State, Province, or Country

Year (Range)

1704

To

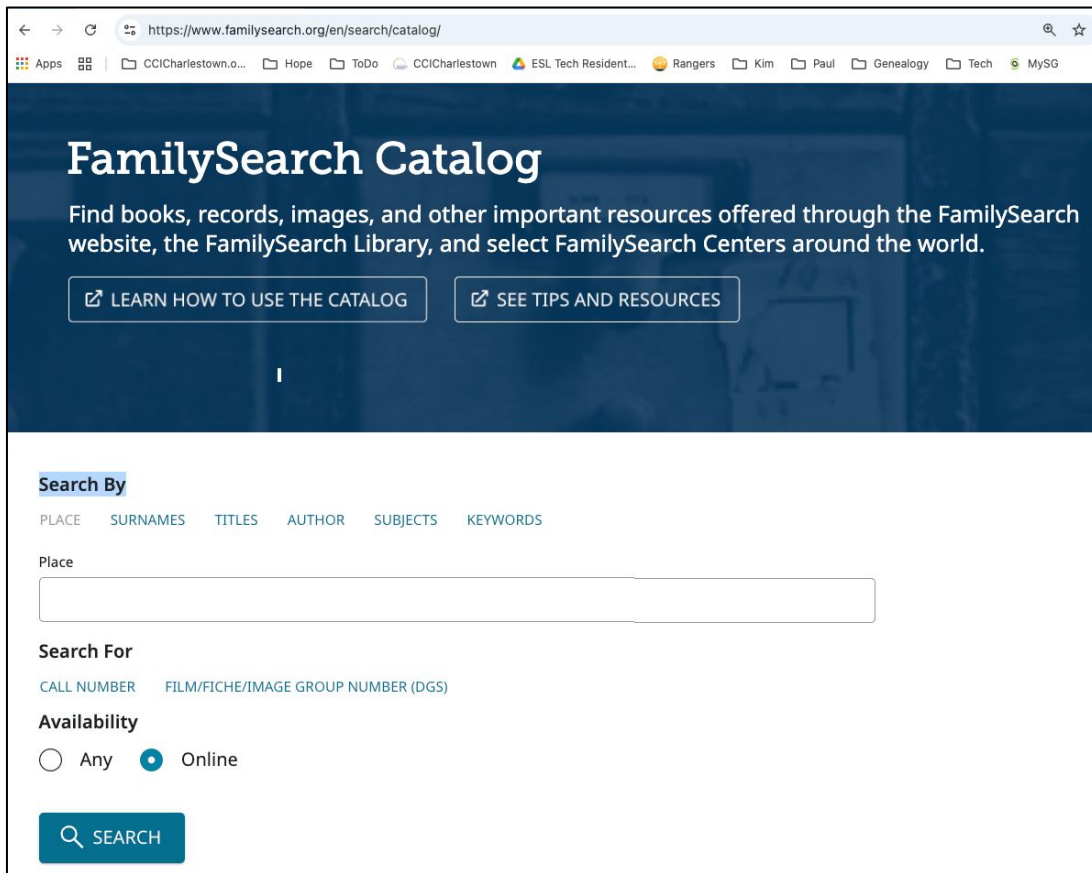
Add Family Member

🔍 SEARCH

RESET

FamilySearch Catalog

Be aware of the variety of options (tabs) when you search Catalog.



The screenshot shows the FamilySearch Catalog website. The browser's address bar displays the URL <https://www.familysearch.org/en/search/catalog/>. The page has a dark blue header with the title "FamilySearch Catalog" and a description: "Find books, records, images, and other important resources offered through the FamilySearch website, the FamilySearch Library, and select FamilySearch Centers around the world." Below the header are two buttons: "LEARN HOW TO USE THE CATALOG" and "SEE TIPS AND RESOURCES". The main content area is white and contains a "Search By" section with tabs for "PLACE", "SURNAMES", "TITLES", "AUTHOR", "SUBJECTS", and "KEYWORDS". The "PLACE" tab is selected, and there is a text input field for searching by place. Below this is a "Search For" section with tabs for "CALL NUMBER" and "FILM/FICHE/IMAGE GROUP NUMBER (DGS)". The "Availability" section has two radio buttons: "Any" and "Online", with "Online" selected. At the bottom is a blue "SEARCH" button with a magnifying glass icon.

FamilySearch Catalog

Find books, records, images, and other important resources offered through the FamilySearch website, the FamilySearch Library, and select FamilySearch Centers around the world.

[LEARN HOW TO USE THE CATALOG](#) [SEE TIPS AND RESOURCES](#)

Search By

PLACE SURNAMES TITLES AUTHOR SUBJECTS KEYWORDS

Place

Search For

CALL NUMBER FILM/FICHE/IMAGE GROUP NUMBER (DGS)

Availability

☐ Any ☒ Online

Ancestry Search

- Use “Sounds Like” option for name variations (Soundex)
- Use exact match when you’re confident in spelling
- Check date ranges – births vary from records
- Browse results carefully – context helps verify ancestors
- Be critical about results - check for corroboration

Search

All Collections

Census & Voter Lists

Birth, Marriage & Death

Military

Immigration & Travel

Public Member Trees

Card Catalog

Search by face

Member Search

Search full text **NEW**

Searching in Ancestry Example

First & Middle Name(s)	Last Name

Place your ancestor might have lived	Birth Year

Search

Show fewer options ^

☐ Match all terms exactly

Add event: [Birth](#) [Marriage](#) [Death](#) [Lived In](#) [Any Event](#) [More](#) ^

Add family member: [Father](#) [Mother](#) [Sibling](#) [Spouse](#) [Child](#)

Keyword

Gender

-- Select -- ^

Race/Nationality

Collection Focus

United States ^

☒ Historical Records

☒ Family Trees

☒ Stories & Publications

☒ Photos & Maps

Search

Clear search

Search Census Records

- Census shows whole families together – great for relationships
- Search by location and name, then check related ages
- Look at neighboring households for relatives
- Check multiple census years to track family movement
- Different decades capture different information, family member names begin 1850, prior to that heads of household
- See our 2024 talk on [Censuses](#)

Searching Vital Records

- Birth certificates: parents' names, maiden name, birthplace
- Marriage records: both spouses, witnesses, sometimes parents
- Death records: parents, occupation, burial location, cause of death
- Always verify with multiple sources for accuracy
- We will cover in more detail in a talk later this year

When You Hit a Brick Wall

Review Findings

Try Alternatives

Search their relatives

Explore new places

Search Alternative Records (red)

- Military records – Veterans, pensions, discharge papers
- Land & property deeds – Show dates and places
- Newspapers & obituaries – Rich in family details
- Church records – Baptisms, marriages, burials

Search Your Relatives - FAN Method

- Siblings & Cousins - Research for clues about your ancestor
- Neighbors - May be related; check census records
- Witnesses - Were often family members

Modern Search Techniques and AI

- FamilySearch full-text search – Finds unindexed records
- AI transcription – Reads old handwriting automatically
- Auto-translation – Converts foreign language documents
- AI helps organize – Suggests matching records and dates
- Generalized searches may find information in sources you didn't know exist.

Always Verify What You Find

- Use multiple independent sources to confirm
- Check dates and places match logically (marriage after birth)
- Compare handwriting and details across documents
- Note conflicting information in your research journal or in fact area of Ancestry or your genealogy software (i.e. Family Tree Maker)

Know Your Resources

- FamilySearch.org – Largest free genealogy database
- Ancestry/MyHeritage – Paid but comprehensive records
- Google Books, Archive.Org
- Your library – Often free access to paid sites
- Local resources – County records, historical societies

Wrap Up - Quick Checklist

- ☐ Do you know your search goal
- ☐ Have you collected all basic facts?
- ☐ Have you picked the right database to further your goal?
- ☐ Have you tried multiple search strategies?
- ☐ Remember the Big Four: Name, Date, Place, Relationship
- ☐ Verify, Verify, Verify



Feel free to contact us.

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