

Finding Her: Our Female Ancestor

Melissa C. Tennant, MLS

Genealogy@ACPL.Info

260-421-1225

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Keys to locating the female

- Determine her relationships
- Research the laws that impacted her life
- Search for the records created by the female or those individuals who participated in her life
- Find “evidence” of her life through other individuals instead of directly through the female

Evidence

- If the female cannot be found in records, compile a list of relations, neighbors, and acquaintances that were in her life
- Create family group sheets, acquaintance sheets, or timelines
- Search for these other individuals’ records to find information about the female ancestor
- Even though she may not be mentioned by name in a document, other key details may be determined based on what is provided

Her rights

- Femme-sole
 - Single, widow or divorced woman
 - She retained legal rights based on locality and time period
- Femme covert
 - Married woman
 - She was dependent on husband and had no rights of her own

Laws

- Review laws that affected the female
- Search the laws and statutes in the city, county, and state along with federal laws
- Note amendments or modifications to the law based on the time period as laws changed
- Places to search:
 - *Black’s Law Dictionary*. Rev. 4th ed. St. Paul, MN: West Publishing Co., 1968.
 - American Memory Project has the *United States Statutes at Large* available for 1789-1875 at <<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwsl.html>>
 - *The Hidden Half of the Family: A Sourcebook for Women’s Genealogy* by Christina Schaefer (published by Genealogical Publishing Co. in 1999) has a synopsis of laws by state
 - Different states have guidebooks for genealogy research which feature state laws

Records

- Family Histories
- Family Documents
 - Religious papers, letters, diaries
 - Personal papers
 - Manuscript Collections (available on microfilm)
 - *New England Women & Their Families in the 18th & 19th Centuries*
 - *Records of the Ante-Bellum Southern Plantations from the Revolution to the Civil War*
 - *Southern Women & Their Families in the 19th Century*
- Newspapers
 - Obituaries for the female and her family
 - Birth and marriage announcements
 - Notices of separation, probate, or court filings
 - Notifications of family visits and events
- Church Records
 - Baptismal, marriage, and burial registers
 - Church committees and activities
 - Annuals that list church members
- Census Records
 - 1840 Census of pensioners included widows receiving pensions
 - 1850 Census asked if married within that year
 - 1870 Census asked if parents were born in a foreign country
 - 1880-1930 Census asked for parents' birthplace
 - 1900-1910 Census asked the number of years married, number of children, and how many were living
 - 1930 Census asked for age at first marriage
- Naturalization Records
 - 1855-1922 Women became citizens by marrying a man with citizenship
 - 1907-1922 If the marriage ended, the woman retained her citizenship
 - 1907-1922 A woman lost her citizenship if she married a foreign citizen
 - After 1922 Women had to apply to become United States citizens
- Land Records
 - Laws depended on the time period and locality
 - Upon widowhood, a woman had a right to a third of her husband's property called dower rights
 - Though she had rights to the property, she did not own the property
 - A woman lost her dower if she remarried
- Wills & Probate Records
 - Spouses, daughters, daughter-in-laws, siblings, and other individuals can appear in a will or in probate records as heirs
 - Dependent on the law at the time, if a woman's husband died and there were underage children, a guardian would be assigned by the court