

# Connecting the Geographical Dots | Utilizing Google Maps for Genealogical Research



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## Creating a Google Account

1. Visit any Google site. For this example, I have used <http://maps.google.com>.
2. Click on “Sign in” (on Google Maps, in the upper right-hand corner)
3. Click on “Create Account”
4. Fill out the form
  - a. Either choose a new username (email) or use your current email instead
5. Click Next, continue to fill out the form, agree to the terms.
6. Return to <http://maps.google.com> and sign in with the account information you just created.

\*There are many amazing things you can do with Google Maps, but for the sake of time we'll only focus on a few. Please take the time to explore all of the different features!

## Accessing & Using Google's *My Maps* Feature

There are 2 ways to access the *My Maps* section of Google Maps:

### Option #1:

1. Go to <http://maps.google.com>
2. In the top left, click on the three stacked lines by the search bar (hamburger menu).
3. On the menu that opens, choose the “Your Places” option.

### Option #2:

1. Go to <http://www.google.com/mymaps> or <http://mymaps.google.com>

Either Option will take you to the My Maps landing page. Notice that the default view is maps you own- maps you have created yourself. You can also view maps others have shared with you as well as explore public maps others have created.

# Creating Your Own Map!

## Navigating the Legend:

- A layer is a group of location markers, lines, shapes, etc. that can be turned on and off on the map.
- Organize layers by record type, individual, year, etc.
- Each piece on a layer can be edited- use different colors, icons, etc.
- The checkmark next to the layer's name is used to turn the layer on or off.
- Choose the appearance and features of the Base Map- lighter is often better but this is purely personal preference.

## The Toolbar:

- Undo, Redo and Select Item: Basic navigation tools
- Adding a Marker:
  - Click the "Add Marker" button and select anywhere on the map. Name the marker, and add a description if desired.
  - OR- search for a specific location in the search bar/select from the dropdown list. Click "Add to Map" to add a marker at that location.
- Drawing a Line:
  - Click the "Draw a Line" button, and select your desired option.
  - Add Line or Shape: Click anywhere to start your line or shape, continue clicking to further the line, click twice to end the line or click on the beginning point to create a shape. Click on the line to see distance and on the shape to see area and perimeter. Dragging the dots on the lines edits the line or shape.
  - Add driving/biking/walking route: Click on your starting place. Continue to click on the map to create your route, click twice to end route. Edit the route by clicking and dragging the route. Edit the addresses of points A and B in the legend.
    - Important! You cannot personalize the colors/icons/etc. of the route.  
**Workaround:** Create your route, add a line (to a DIFFERENT layer), and trace the route! Turn off the route layer if desired.
- Adding directions:
  - Click the "Add Directions" button. Notice the layer that is created in the legend to the left.
  - Type in your start and end locations, and your route should appear on the map. *\*This is just like adding a driving/biking/walking route above but EASIER\**
  - Click and drag to edit the route, but you cannot edit more than that. See workaround above!
- Measuring Distances and Areas:

- Click the “Measuring Distances and Areas” button, and click on your starting point on the map. Continue clicking, click twice to end the line or click on the starting point to create a shape.
- This is TEMPORARY. After showing you the distance/area, it will disappear. For a more permanent measurement, use “Draw a line or shape” above.

## Sample Maps and Ideas

### Tracking Immigration, Emigration, Migration

- Use the “Add Directions” button to create a layer showing directions between two locations.
- Use “Draw a Line” to trace over the route if you’d like to connect multiple points along your ancestors’ travel routes.
- Add names and descriptions to the points and lines to detail their journey.
- Color code or use different symbols to map various routes of different family members

### Mapping an Ancestor’s Life

#### Importing a spreadsheet

- When you very first open My Maps, in the legend on the left you will see a blue “Import” button. Click on it to open the import options.
- You can choose between the 4 file types that you would like to upload, most likely a CSV (Comma Separated Value) or an XLSX (Excel Spreadsheet) file, OR
- If you use Google Drive and Google Sheets, you can select one of those sheets to import.
  - Make sure that your spreadsheet has as much information as possible, that you clear out any empty rows, and that your columns have headers.
- Choose columns to position your placemarks: Select whichever header(s) represent(s) the column where the location information is stored
  - *Remember! This is not choosing which columns will be imported, only which columns have location data. All columns will be imported.*
- Choose a column to title your markers: This is up to you and what you need the map to show you. I often choose “date.” Choose finish, and view your map!
- You may see on the legend on the left that there were some errors with your data. Open the data table to view these errors, fix them if you can, or ignore them if they are irrelevant.
- Customize your map!
  - Style the data by name to see events by individual, by event, by date, etc.
  - Choose a base map that allows you to read the data easily
  - Draw lines to connect points and find patterns or possible locations of new records
  - The possibilities are endless!

### *Distinguishing Between Individuals*

If you know that there are multiple individuals with the same name as your ancestor in close proximity, it can be helpful to create maps to distinguish between them.

- Try creating a layer for each individual and styling each layer with a specific color or symbol marker.
- Create a separate layer for unknown events or records and move them to the correct layer when you can determine who it pertains to.
- Turn each layer on and off to see different patterns and learn different information.
- If helpful, add images of records to the points on the map- such as handwriting samples or signatures.

### *Traveling to your Ancestral Homeland*

This is done through either Google Maps (<http://maps.google.com>) OR Google Earth (<http://earth.google.com>)

Google Maps:

1. Search for the location you wish to visit in the search bar on Google Maps
2. In the very bottom right-hand corner of the screen, look for the little yellow human icon.
3. Click and drag the icon, and drop it over your desired location.
  - a. Any street that is highlighted in blue is available. You cannot drop the human icon on a street that remains white.
  - b. The blue dots represent a “photo sphere,” a 360° view of the area from that point.
  - c. The orange dot represents a building where “street view” has been created of the inside. In the past, I have seen the inside of historic churches and cemeteries because of this feature.
4. While in “street view,” click and drag to rotate, and click in the direction you would like to move. You will see an arrow on the screen if moving in that direction is available.
5. In the bottom left-hand corner, there is a miniature version of the map that you can expand. Click on the map to move to that location, photo sphere, or indoor view.

Google Earth:

1. Search Google Earth the same way you search in Google Maps, though enable the search bar by clicking the magnifying glass in the left sidebar.
2. Google Earth is meant to be more of an exploration of the world than Google Maps is. Clicking on locations/buildings provides more information than in Google Maps.
3. Click and drag to move, toggle between 3D and 2D in the bottom right. Here you will see the human icon as well, this time white. Click and drag in the same way to enter street view.