Eleven Layers of Online Searches
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No one search method works all the time. Both online and classic search methods have their advantages and limitations. Genealogists need to know how to switch from one type of online search to another. Layering advanced search techniques (from No Name searches to refined Alphabetical Browsing) helps you find more online before switching to classic resources (books, periodicals, and microfilms/microfiche).

PART I: ELECTRONIC SEARCHING AND ITS FRUSTRATIONS

A ROSE by any other spelling is often missed by online search tools or at least buried in a long list of possible matches.

Alternate Search Techniques:
1. Try just the name (given name and last name) to see how many results you get and where they come from (particularly the geographic location and the types of records found). For common names focus on just one record group (example: Tennessee 1860 U.S. Census).
2. Try that name with identifiers (life event words like *born* or *birth*, date of life event, place of life event, place of residence, race, age range, occupation, etc.)
3. Try variations on the names (initials, name abbreviations, nicknames, maiden and/or married names, and phonetic spellings) to float different results to the top of results lists.
4. Use advanced search features such as phrases in quotes, Boolean operands (AND, OR, NOT) or the equivalent boxes in an advanced search template (example: with all the words, with the exact phrase, with at least one of the words, without the words), or wild card searches (if allowed). Try wild card searches on truncated names and try replacing the vowels in the first three letters of the name. This is called an AEIOUY search. This type of search (example: man*, men*, min*, mon*, mun*, and myn*) is very good for finding not only occurrences of the surname MONDAY, but also MANDEE, MANDIE, MANDY, MONDEE, MONDY, MUNDAY, and MUNDY.
5. Try searching on no first name (last name only) with geographic limitations to create a list of everyone with that last name in that town, district, city, (or if a rare name) state. Watch for the first name in a variant form or the name of someone else in that family or household. If not found at that location, broaden your search geographically. Study maps and migration patterns for that area and time period to focus your broadened search.
6. Try searching on no last name (given names only) with geographic and other identifiers.
7. Try searching on no name at all, but rather on identifiers (that are less likely to be spelled strangely) such as place born, sex, race, age range, occupation, event titles (born, birth, married, marriage, died, etc.). The search fields available vary with each database and search engine. Search engines with keyword fields make this easier.

8. Try searching on another name that should be found in that household. Do a search without an individual's name but instead by relationship (a parent search or a spouse search) or for anyone else who may have been mentioned in a record about the person for whom you are searching.
9. Try searching on the name of a known neighbor who should also be listed in that record collection…especially a neighbor born in the same state as your migrating ancestor.
10. If allowed, try searching on a combination of related names (example: husband's surname AND wife's maiden name). If a combined search is not available in that particular online search tool, do these searches separately, print the first fifty or so results, and manually compare both lists. This type of layered search can be very effective, but time consuming. To save eyestrain, print to a file and use your Adobe Acrobat or word processor's ability to **Find on Page** [Crtl + F].
11. If all of the above fail, try a different search site or a classic resource (book, periodical, or microfilm/microfiche). (See Part II and Part III.) Layering and comparing classic and online searches brings the best results when simpler searches fail.

TIP: Try all of the above searches with fewer pieces to match on (if too few matches are found) or more pieces to match on (if too many matches are returned). Mix and match the pieces you use in your searches. This is important because many search tools will leave out a match if one field you told it to search on is missing in that record!

NOTE: Numerical ranges (age ranges, ranges of years to be searched, etc.) seem to cause matches to be missed more often than any other required element in searches. If you don't find someone you think should be there, try taking numerical ranges out of your search requirements.

PART II: IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED, TRY A DIFFERENT TOOL

Alternate search tools:
1. Use the advanced search features offered at that site. (And yes, you will have to read the instructions.)
   a. Use advanced search templates (when available) that typically offer more filters
   b. Add wildcards to your searches (each site does them differently)
   c. At Ancestry.com use the Card Catalog link under the Search tab. This allows you to search or browse a list of all the record collections (30,000+) to find just one collection to search more deeply. When you use Ancestry's basic search template, their search engine has to be "dumbed down to the lowest common denominator," so searching on just one collection often returns better results.
   d. Browse collections by category. At Ancestry.com you have the Special Collections list (right side of the Search page). This list is organized by categories, specific types of records, and then individual record collections. (Example: Historical Records > Census & Voter Lists > U.S. Federal Census>1860) Work down to the point where you are ready to search.

e. Look for geographic tools and filters. (At Ancestry.com this is Explore by Location using a table or map located below the search template on the SEARCH page under the Search tab.)

2. Try a different search site with a different index to the same records and/or different search features built into its search tools. Example: Try making the same search at Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.org (or another major genealogy database site which may be free at your local library or FamilySearch Center/Library). Compare the results that float to the top at each site. This is also good if you can't read a portion of a record you've found. It may be more legible at a different Web site. Online newspaper collections rarely contain a full series of any newspaper. Searching at different sites frequently turns up additional matches because another site had more or different papers.

3. If online searching isn't returning the results you need, try searching the same records on CD if you can find them and a computer which can still run them with an older operating system compatible with that CDs files. Often an older CD version of a collection will include additional search features not found in the online version of that collection. Example: the Pedigree Resource File online at FamilySearch.org has a list of sources but no NOTES section. The CD version of the Pedigree Resource File has more search features for the master index, even more search features on each CD in the set, and the ability to view and print in many different ways. The same was true of the 1880 U.S. Census Index on CD done by the LDS Church.

4. If online and CD searches still don't return the results you need, search for a book, manuscript, or microform (microfilm or microfiche) that is likely to contain a record (or a copy of a record) with the information you are seeking. This seems very basic, but you would be amazed how many people stop if they can't find something easily online. Many people never progress from the simple gathering of the Survey phase of family tree building to the even more powerful original record Research and Evaluation phases.

NOTE: The smaller the geographic area covered in an index, the more likely the person doing the transcribing is familiar with the families in that area and the less likely you are to have transcription errors. But there are exceptions to this rule. The error may be in the original record and not in the index. Example: one census enumerator listed Edmund GROSS as Ed GOOSE.

PART III: HOW YOU GET THERE DOES MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Why do genealogists pull a book off the shelf and immediately browse the index, but when searching online they ignore the alphabetical and/or geographical browse options and go straight for the search templates (where you fill in the boxes for given name, surname, date, place, etc.)?

WorldVitalRecords.com is a commercial genealogy site with the usual basic search template on its home page. Its strong Browse by Surname feature (the most thorough way to search that site) is hidden under their BROWSE tab.

To get to the Browse by Surname features at WorldVitalRecords.com:
1. Go to *www.worldvitalrecords.com*. You do not need to have a subscription to make the search—you do need one to see the records in which you find results at this site.

2. Hover over the Browse tab at the top of the page and click on *Browse by Surname*
3. Click on the first letter of the surname you are researching. (example: R for Renick)
4. Next click on the correct first and second letter of surname (example: Re for Renick)
5. Click on the correct first, second and third letter combination (example: Ren for Renick)
6. Notice many possible alternate spellings start to appear in the listed names found in records in WorldVitalRecords.com databases. Note that for *Ren…* only the first 500 results are shown from a total of 1,469 surnames that start with *Ren*. Keep narrowing your results while watching for likely name spelling variations such as RENICK, RENNICK, RENICH, RENAC, RENIX etc.
7. Once you have narrowed your results alphabetically, simple click on a likely name (like Renac) and notice the statistics box that appears above the list of categories and specific records mentioning that name (Renac Results: 671 matches in 36 databases…).

What is lovely is that you can tell the surname Renac appears 4 times in the US Naturalization Records collection at WVR and decide if it is worth paying for a subscription (or finding a Family History Center or Library with a subscription). Sometimes you can even find that resource in a source that is free (at a library, archives, or in an online collection).

How to find name variations for your surnames (and given names, too):
1. Check the International Genealogical Index at the FamilySearch.org site. (At that site click on SEARCH then under *Browse All Published Collections* type in IGI.) Notice the lists of matches include phonetic and regional variations on the first and last names. By default both the Community Contributed IGI and Community Indexed IGI tabs are used. Use the *Spelling Substitution Tables for the United States and Canada* at the FamilySearch Research Wiki site (*www.familysearch.org* > SEARCH > WIKI > in the search box type in *Spelling Substitution Tables for the United States and Canada* then click on the appropriately titled link in the results list. See the wiki article "*Guessing a Name Variation*" that appears in this results list, too. It covers more than twenty ways to find variant spellings for names.
2. Use the FamilySearch Place Research Tool: *www.familysearch.org/research/places/*
3. Compile you own alphabetical list of surname spelling variations in your word processor (or in the notes of that person's record in your personal genealogy program). Track these spelling variations by location and time period in which they were found and/or proved.
4. See the Names category at Cyndi's List (*www.cyndislist.com/names*)

It is common for online search tools to offer different search options and return different search results when approached from different places on the Internet or even from within one Web site. For example, Google Books (*books.google.com*) returns results from the Internet Archive site (*archive.org*) but the Internet Archive site does not return results from Google Books. Archive Finder from Chadwyck Healey brought together the CD versions of *ArchivesUSA* and the *National Inventory of Documentary Sources* (both U.S. and UK/Ireland portions). *ArchiveGrid* (from OCLC which also produces *WorldCat*) is derived from the WorldCat database and has more than 4 million archival material entries. While they both deal with archival/manuscript materials they are not from the same sources and often return different results.