

“I Wish I Had Known That! Real-Life Tips & Hints When Researching at the Courthouse”

True stories from Kaye Ford

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▶ **Tip #1: Do research before you research!** Always check the days and hours that courthouse offices are open, especially when traveling out of town to research! Check for a **website** or **phone number**. Also, if genealogical research isn't noted on their website, call ahead to find out if the general public has easy access to their old records. Most courthouses are closed on national holidays.

- ▶ **Tip #2: Learn the offices where certain documents are held:**
- ▶ --**Clerk:** Marriage, divorce, probate, wills, estate, court records (civil and criminal cases), naturalization records
- ▶ --**Recorder:** Deeds, land records, mortgages (Rush County has many old newspapers here!)
- ▶ --**Auditor:** Real estate transactions
- ▶ --**Assessor:** Tax records
- ▶ --**Health Department:** Birth and death records
- ▶ --Some counties may have an Archives Department where the oldest documents are stored.
- ▶ --Some counties may store their oldest documents off-site and require advance notice of what records you seek.

Tip #3: Know your beginning information! Write down on paper important information regarding the documents you seek, such as your ancestor's name, the date or date range of the event, and take it with you. Sometimes, a courthouse will not allow you to bring in your cellphone or other electronic devices (**Henry County and Wayne County**).

I use a small notebook to (1) information I know (names, dates, places); (2) what I am looking for; (3) record what information I find; and (4) write down where I found it and any other fascinating tidbits or names.

Tip #4: PENCILS ONLY! When looking at the old records and making notes to yourself on your paper, **use pencil**. Unfortunately, I have seen comments in ink added to registers by people who were correcting a misspelling or date. *Record in your own notes* how it was transcribed or written at that time and make a note in your citation as to any discrepancies. **DO NOT make corrections to original records!!**

254.
RIVERSIDE CEMETERY RECORD.

NAME OF DECEASED	PLACE OF NATIVITY	LATE RESIDENCE	DATE OF BIRTH	Date of Death	Date of Interment	DISEASE
McAuley, Silas P.	Crown County	Spencer, Ind.	April 22 '81	May 26 '1882	May 27 '1882	Cholera Infantum
McCartney, John	Crown County	Spencer, Ind.	March 26 '1881	March 4 '1884	March 5 '1884	Consumption
McGuire, Thomas		Spencer, Ind.		May 5, 1888	May 7, 1888	Dropsy
McGuire, Jerry H.		Spencer, Ind.		Dec. 3, 1888	Dec. 4, 1888	Lung Fever
McMahon,		Spencer, Ind.		March 15, '87	Mar. 17, 1887	Consumption
McGuire, R. H.		Spencer, Ind.		March 13, 1891	March 4, 1891	Bright's Disease
McGuire, Mary				July 25, 1892	July 26, 1892	
McGuire,		Spencer, Ind.		Nov. 23, 1893	Nov. 25, 1893	

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Tip #5: CITE WHAT YOU FIND! Regarding citations, make sure you note where you find these documents! This is of **extreme importance** when you pick up the copy of the document a couple weeks, months, or years later and can't remember what book you found it in or what website you saved it from or whoever made your copy missed getting the page number copied.

Basic Citations

Consistency Is Key!

- Who, What, When, Where, and Wherein
- Citations can be layered (Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Evidence Explained*, 2nd Edition)

Newspaper: “Social Reunion,” database with images, *NewspaperArchive* (<https://www.newspaperarchive.com> : accessed 5 February 2023); citing *The (Richmond) Daily Palladium*, 1 May 1901, page 1, column 4.

Book: Robert Gorman, “St. Andrews Cemetery,” *The History of One Hundred Years of St. Andrew Parish, Richmond, Indiana, 1846-1946* (Richmond, Ind.: 1946), p. 305 and 309; Morrisson-Reeves Library, Richmond, Indiana.

Census: 1900 U.S. Census, Cincinnati, Hamilton, Ohio, population schedule, Enumeration District no. 156, sheet no. 11A (penned), dwelling no. 94, family no. 238, entry for Julia Doyle in household of John Doyle, image 21 of 24; digital image, *Ancestry* (<https://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 5 February 2023); citing NARA microfilm publication T623, roll 1278.

Online Database: “Indiana, U.S., Birth Certificates, 1907-1944,” database with images, *Ancestry* (<https://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 10 January 2023), entry for Dorothy Julia Mayer, 4 November 1909, Richmond, Wayne County, Indiana, registered number (no.) 53274 (stamped), image 784 of 2013; citing Indiana State Board of Health, Indiana Archives and Records Administration, Indianapolis, microfilm, Birth Certificates, year: 1909, roll: 22.

Tip #6: Picture or no picture? Ask staff first if you are allowed to snap a picture of a document with your cellphone. If it is allowed, try to remember to **turn your flash off** (the flash can actually cause degeneration of the record). Even if you take a picture, it's a good idea to go ahead and get a hard copy of the record. Most times, the staff at the courthouse will take the book (usually oversized heavy registers) and make the copy as they are accustomed to doing so.

Tip #7: If possible, ask to see the **actual** register book or document before the staff transcribes it. Also, try to snap your own photo of it, if allowed.

For example, in New Castle birth and death records are recorded in a register book and when you request a certificate the staff will transcribe what is handwritten in the book into their computer and print the certificate. Check the certificate **before** you leave the office!

Also, if the health department has a computer system where they enter information from the register and then print the document, most times they'll check the computer first to see if someone has already requested that document, which they will then print and not even pull the book.

Tip #8: Look for the **indexes!** This will save you an untold amount of time. I recently did some research in the clerk's office in the Rush County Courthouse, looking for probate and estate records. They have the original documents stored in hundreds of metal boxes that line the upper half of the room. I found the general index, which gave me the book and page number to find the general information about the estate but it also gave me the **box number** to find the actual documents! And thankfully that box was within reach.



Tip #9: If you need to hire a researcher to search at a courthouse that is a great distance from you, check the Association of Professional Genealogists website (www.apgen.org). Not using an APG researcher was a disappointment and, frankly, a waste of money and time.



Tip #10: I have a friend who earned her Ph.D. in history at an Ivy League school and is also an archivist. Her tip to me when researching at a repository such as a courthouse? Bring in a **small gift** for the staff, like store-bought baked goods. Maybe a gift card to a popular coffee shop, flowers in the spring, movie tickets? Most times, the staff will work hard to find what you're looking for and most likely they don't get thanked often enough.



Extra Links!

FunStuffForGenealogists.com

APGen.org

January-March 2016 edition of the NGS Magazine, titled “Cameras in the Courthouse” by Pam Anderson (NGSGenealogy.org)

Randolph County: randolphcounty.us/departments/clerk

Henry County: henryco.net/ClerksOffice.aspx

Rush County: <http://www.rushcounty.in.gov/public/countyoffices/clerk/index.cfm>