

Finding *Original* Names and Towns (for 19th – 20th C immigrants)

Tips and Strategies:

1. Focus on **one question**. (Then repeat, but first define each question.)
2. **Carefully re-examine** every piece of information you have, then proceed with new research to find and verify clues.
3. Sign up for **FamilySearch.org** if you don't have an account.
4. Before searching for records overseas, (re)start with your parents, grandparents, and great grandparents, especially all the immigrant/s. Do **thorough US (or current-country-of origin) research** to find and evaluate as many records/documents as possible (using Ancestry.com, MyHeritage.com, FamilySearch.org and resources listed below).
5. **Birth**. Usually gives parent names. Could provide original names or originally used ways of spelling a name (which could help find a ship or naturalization record).
6. **Marriage**. Usually gives parents' names and addresses.
7. **Death**. Often includes parents' names. Evaluate carefully as the people providing this information may no longer know original names.
8. **Census**: Look carefully (again) **at original census records** – especially from 1910, 1900 and earlier. Did someone write the name of a town or country on a census and then cross it out (Budapest, Kiev, Odessa, Minsk, Riga, Wilna (Vilna); Warsaw)? These cross outs, while not uncommon, were usually indexed as Russia.
9. **Census**: Who is living nearby or in the same house/apartment? Often recent immigrants were living near family. Read census records several pages on either side of your ancestors' residences to find potential relatives. How many babies did each woman report? Finding birth/death records for children that died young could yield another address or original name (or namesake).
10. **US State Census Records**. The 1890 federal census did not survive. But there are 19 states with census records from 1884-1896. There are 41 states with some type of census records in the 19th and 20th C.:
https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Census_State_Censuses
11. **Naturalization records**. Obtain **all** forms (declaration of intention, petition, state version, and others). Some forms asked a key question: AKA (also known as).
12. **Ship records**. US records had more information after 1900 (including address where going). Might have to determine original first name in order to search accurately. (For example, Max might = Mordache; Fannie might = Faige.)
13. **City Directories**. A gold mine of information about where your ancestor/s lived, worked; who they married; when they left the area (rem); and who else in the

family lived or worked with them. Most are indexed, but you could pull an entire **City Directory** and read the street index and the business or ad sections.

14. **Newspapers.** Search them even if you are “sure” your people did not make the papers. They often did, especially in small towns. The Brooklyn Eagle is worth searching (<https://bklyn.newspapers.com>). **Obituaries** are essential. Gather as many as you can to widen the branches on your tree (then research those people to find more clues or proof).
15. **Gravestones.** Search
 - (a) JOWBR <https://www.jewishgen.org/databases/cemetery/>
 - (b) Find a Grave <https://www.findagrave.com> and
 - (c) BillionGraves <https://billiongraves.com> .If Jewish, translate the Hebrew to learn their and their father’s Hebrew names, which could give you the name used to emigrate.
Need Translations? Post to ViewMate (JewishGen.org) or Genealogy Translations on FaceBook.
16. **Military registrations and/or service.** Most US men (regardless of age) had to register for WWI and WWII even if they didn’t serve. Men were asked: “What is the name of the town where you were born.” And “Who will always know where you are.”
17. **Probate Records.** Search online and call state/county offices or archives. Find the genealogy expert in the current town/city where the ancestor died to get advice on indexing projects (Some local genealogy groups have indexed probate records).
18. **Other court documents:** land transactions, official name changes, divorce, criminal proceedings. See FamilySearch Wiki to seek information based on the **place/s** your ancestor/s lived.
19. **Social Security (US) applications.** You can order an ancestor’s SSN application. It could contain an original name. <https://www.ssa.gov/forms/ssa-711.pdf>
20. **Personal papers or notes** when someone passes away. Photograph them with your phone.
21. **Keep researching siblings from the oldest generation/s** thoroughly even though they are not part of your direct line (or interest). Review town names, changed surnames, and common addresses.
22. **Addresses.** Note **all** addresses as part of each record saved. Copy and paste them into **each** record. This will help confirm (or refute) your ancestor in other records and it could allow you to search for a census or other record that was not indexed accurately. **Addresses are essential for confirmation that you have the right person/family.**

23. **Map** common street names/areas. You should start to see patterns when you have enough data points. You might be able to figure out a hard-to-read place name.
24. **FamilySearch.org**. Of the millions of records in Family Search, about 25% are indexed digitally. But you can access the 75% that are uploaded **without digital indexes** because many of the records sets have a printed index at the beginning or a logical pattern that allows you to find records when you are in the correct category (e.g., US, Ohio, Cuyahoga Cleveland, vital records, Birth records 1873-1908). Free videos from RootsTech (see below or “google” videos about how to use unindexed records in FamilySearch).
25. Read and use **FamilySearch Wikis** for your relevant jurisdictions or places. Gather as much information about your ancestor as you have. Then:
 - a. **Type all you know** about the ancestor/s in **one** concise Word doc. Email it to relevant city, county, state offices/archives. They may re-route you to correct archive/office (or just send you the record).
 - b. **Join a genealogy group** where your ancestor lived. Ask the expert/s there for advice and/or hire them to do research.
 - c. **Call archives/record offices by phone** for advice or to order records. They are often curious and sometimes search internal databases you cannot access.
26. **Search Google books and Google** extensively and creatively. An ancestor might have written something (or had something written about them or their business).
27. **Call or video conference your relatives**, especially the ones you don't know. Keep them talking. Photograph their pictures, ask who they are and return for follow-up visits by phone, Zoom, or in person. People might say: “I don't know anything” but then they remember “that man was at their bar mitzvah” so he must have been alive when they were 13.
28. **Call, email, or visit the relatives “you don't like”** or with whom your parents or grandparents had a “falling out.” You are not trying to be friends; they (or their descendants) may provide information or records, and/or photos.
29. **DNA** could be helpful (if your matches know more than you), but it doesn't replace the steps above. Certainly, test the oldest living members plus yourself and other family members, but you will still have to follow the paper trails.
 - a. **Pay attention to DNA matches with more than 125 cM (centimorgans) and at least 10-12 segments.**

Resources

- 1. Family Search.org:** <https://www.familysearch.org> Learning how to research UNINDEXED records may be the most important, underutilized source for genealogists. **Sign up for a free account if you don't have one.** Search the **Catalog** based on the PLACES your ancestor lived. It is free and essential. One must be physically in a local Family Search library (Falmouth Public Library or LDS—Mormon-- Church) to download most locked records (indicated with a 'key' logo).
<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/media/video/2018-02-3270-finding-elusive-records-at-familysearch?lang=eng>
("Finding Elusive Records at FamilySearch" by Robert Kehrer).
- 2. JewishGen.org:** <https://www.jewishgen.org> \$0-100.
Sign up for a free account if you don't have one. **ViewMate** is for requesting translations. Use **Town Finder** to confirm your Eastern European towns. Use **Complete List of Databases** for research: while doing extensive US (or country-of-origin) research check your original names and towns to see if your people were there.
- 3. Ancestry.com.** Learn to use the Card Catalog (which is based on Places) and subscribe to Crista Cowan's (Corporate Genealogist) you tube channel.
<https://www.youtube.com/user/CristaCowan>
- 4. MyHeritage.com.** Check out the education resources. They outline many of the things noted here: Questions for relatives; Searching military records; US City Directory Cheat Sheet. <https://education.myheritage.com/downloadable-resources/>
- 5.** If you suspect a Jewish ancestor, join a **Jewish Genealogical Society** local to where you live now and consider joining the one/s where your ancestors lived.
<https://www.iajgs.org/membership/member-societies/>. Ask for the expert on records for the PLACE your ancestor/s lived. Many programs are on Zoom.
- 6.** Did my ancestors change their names at Ellis Island? No! But did they did change their names before or after emigrating? Yes! Explained here
<https://www.nypl.org/blog/2013/07/02/name-changes-ellis-island>
- 7. Back-up Software recommended.** These are the only two programs (I know about) that back up ALL your documents, records, and data. (GEDCOM does not give you a comprehensive back up.)
 - 1. Family Tree Maker.** <https://www.mackiev.com/ftm/>
 - 2. RootsMagic.** <https://www.rootsmagic.com/>