

A BAKER'S DOZEN OF TIPS:

Finding your Ancestor's Birthplace BY Judy Bradley AGS #2688



Do you have an ancestor whose birthplace seems elusive? Maybe you only have a country that you have found in census records or maybe you have no idea where you should

look. You might find the answer by looking at the following records for your ancestor. If you did look before, it's always a good idea to look again with fresh eyes.

It is a very good idea to look for any siblings in these records too. Perhaps a birthplace is recorded for their name and not for your ancestor!

Records that have something to do with their death seems like a good place to start. Many records are created around death dates. Be wary, however, often the person giving the information did not know your ancestor at birth and is giving what they think it is – especially be careful with records that were created after their death!

1. **Death Registration**

Some registrations give the place of birth of the deceased on death certificates. Take it with a grain of salt – information was given by their spouse, a child or someone else. This is 2nd hand information – your ancestor was already dead when this was recorded! Most likely the person giving this information was not present at the birth. It is still an excellent clue for where your ancestor was born!

2. **Obituaries and Death Notices**

These items are usually found in the newspaper – be sure to check all available newspapers for the

area your ancestor lived in. Perhaps your answer will be found in a notice about the death of their spouse, siblings, child, or parent.

Death notices are usually short (under 100 words). They are commonly found alongside birth and marriage notices. In some earlier newspapers they are found throughout the paper – wherever they had room to print it!

Obituaries are more biographically extensive articles of news about the death of notable or well-known residents of the area. They can be printed up two months after the death.

3. **Monumental Inscriptions**

The inscriptions found on gravestones can give you an indication of where your ancestor was born. If you cannot visit the cemetery in person, you can have someone take a photo for you! Many societies are having photographs published online. (See our own Grande Prairie & District Branch site for Gravemarkers of Northwestern Alberta). If you cannot find the picture online, contact the genealogy group in the area, or GenWeb, or even RAOGK (Random Acts of Genealogical Kindness). For a small fee you may have the cemetery visited for you and a picture or pictures taken for you.

4. **Probate Records**

Have you looked at probate records where your ancestor lived? You might find a probate file or an intestate file. There may be a list of all heirs – including siblings, nieces and nephews or parents “back home”. Search for a record for your ancestor's siblings and parents as they might have a place named.

Sometimes marriage records may be helpful. Again, check for any marriage of siblings of your ancestor as well.

5. **Marriage Registration**

Some marriage registrations give the birth place for the bride and groom. If your ancestor's is not among them, look for their siblings marriage registrations.

6. **Marriage Notices**

Sometimes marriage notices are published – often as society news, but sometimes as news from the area. Siblings must also be searched for too!

When they first came to this land.....

7. **Immigration and Naturalization Records**

Your ancestor may have arrived at a time and place where these records were required. Take care to look at many sources for these records: i.e. applications, certifications, and so on. Check for his siblings too! They may have travelled together or may have arrived through different ports at different times.

8. **Passenger Lists**

Look for your ancestor among the various ships lists. Often you may find them both emigrating from the old country and immigrating to their new home. Both types of lists should be checked – for any siblings as well as for your ancestor.

9. **Assisted Immigration Schemes**

Often throughout history, poor people from heavily populated areas were “assisted” in emigrating. Sometimes a landlord or local official organized a scheme for those who wanted to go to a new land. Passage was paid and often they were given a small amount of money and a small plot of land to make a start on their new home. The assisted immigrants of a particular scheme would often settle in the same township or community. You may find an immigration scheme mentioned in a history book for the area where your ancestor lived. Records from the scheme may be found in a local archive.

10. **Child Immigrant Schemes**

Many orphaned children were sent to a new homeland where they could be apprenticed or work in the labour force as a farmer's helper, or household help. Some children were very lucky and settled with someone who sent them to school. Most orphanages kept good records on the children that were sent, and usually who the child's parents were. Some children had their names changed upon arrival. Records of these children may be found on either side of the Atlantic.

11. **Local Newspapers**

Local newspapers can be very helpful to your research. Often it is here where you may find the clue leading to your ancestor's origin. Local newspapers often placed news about recent arrivals of ships or immigrant trains. Sometimes the post office would publish a list of letters to be picked up at the post office.

12. **Local Histories**

If the county, town or township where your ancestor lived has written a history book, you may find your relative mentioned – sometimes more than just mentioned. You may find a short biography or even better, a more detailed biography. Be certain you check all histories published for your area of interest as different authors and publishers have a different slant on the area and its inhabitants.

13. **Military Records**

Perhaps your ancestor had a military past. Perhaps they were entitled to a pension for their service. You can check for their name in the Civil War, and in the Chelsea Pension Records that may be found online at various places. These have both been happy surprises for me to look for my ancestors. There often is no oral history to bring knowledge of their military past, so it is always a good place to look. Keep in mind that a pension would also go to the widow of a soldier upon his death.