

PREPARING FOR A SUCCESSFUL RESEARCH TRIP

(Betty Kay Anderson, 10 Jan 2007)

Do all the records at HOME that you can before you leave:

Have you interviewed all family members about what they know, and have you ordered all appropriate Vital Records (www.cdc.gov/nchs/howto/w2w/w2welcom.htm)

Check the Family History Library catalog for the county you plan to visit and see what they have filmed for your courthouse – you likely will only need to do rare or odd records not filmed by LDS.

Search the Internet: some good websites (original, NOT secondary records) are

DAR Library GRC Nat'l Index: grc.dar.org/dar/damet/grc/grc.cfm?Action=overview
members.dar.org/dar/damet/grc/grc.cfm

www.heritagequestonline.com

www.ancestry.com

www.familysearch.org

olddirectorysearch.com (city directories)

www.glorerecords.blm.gov (Bureau of Land Management)

freebmd.rootsweb.com

www.newspaperabstracts.com

www.usgenweb.org

abish.byu.edu/specialcollections/fhc/gbsearch.htm

Some state archives are becoming increasingly digitized, so be sure and check their website – you may not need to go there at all.

Use inter-library loan to borrow every local (county) history possible – you can make a list from www.loc.gov (Library of Congress website)

Be sure to make a complete Bibliography of everything you have ever looked at and take it with you – so as to not duplicate your previous work and waste your valuable time.

Make sure that you have checked to see when the county was formed and which were its parent counties as far back as your ancestors might have been there.

Use the HandyBook (or the Red Book or Source or George Schweitzer for your state if he has done your state) to make a list of all libraries and repositories in your area – write or email to each that you might visit and ask for their dates and hours of operation (holidays, renovation, or other reduced hours?) during the time you plan to be there, include an SASE requesting any written material they may have in their Special Collections or Vertical Files. If the State Library is anywhere near your destination, also do the same for them. Be sure that you use the Internet to access the online catalogs for every library and print them out whenever possible. Do likewise for the Courthouse, asking how copies are made and can you pay for them: some courthouses have begun to store their very old records at the state archives or an off-site facility, so be sure and ask that question as well; you may want to copy the appropriate pages from the Red Book to take with you to show the courthouse staff. In case they question the existence of records you know they have.

The Genealogists Address Book by Elizabeth Bentley is an invaluable resource for addresses in the area you are visiting.

Compile the most complete Cemetery list possible: write the Historical and Genealogical Societies, use USGenWeb, consult E. Kay Kirham's cemetery book, and/or email the local librarian until you are CERTAIN that you list is complete. A directory of cemeteries with links to websites can be found at www.daddezio.com/cemetery. You also probably want to visit the local Funeral Homes – get their addresses before you depart; a comprehensive guide can be found at www.usafuneralhomesonline.com

Join the local Historical Society and Genealogical Society; membership to these groups opens doors that aren't otherwise available.

If (as in New York, in particular) there is a Town or County Historian, be sure to contact them in advance; make a clear-cut appointment by mail.

Try and determine the religious denomination of your ancestor(s) before leaving, so you can visit the appropriate church. USGenWeb Archives project has a link to church records organized by state at www.rootsweb.com/~usgenweb/churches

Make a list of your research goals and prioritize them according to record type (deeds, probates, cemetery, etc.) -- you can use this list as kind of a "research log" if you leave enough blank space to record the results of your searches and your documentation.

Materials you should have with you: your photo ID, change for copies, towelettes for cleaning your hands after using dirty records or in cemeteries, extra pencils, note paper in PAD form (so you don't risk leaving loose pages behind), an umbrella for cemeteries, other rain clothes and perhaps boots (cemeteries can be overgrown), your cell phone, and snack food.

Be sure and use MapQuest or other method to get good directions BEFORE you depart for all the places you intend to visit.

Your trip will be improved if you can get hold of a detailed historical map of the entire area you will be visiting -- Jonathan Sheppard (google it!) has a good supply, as do several websites.

Take duplicate copies of all relevant charts.

Create a detailed TIMELINE before you depart.

Keep a day-to-day record (diary) for each day of the trip: note in detail what you found and what you did not find. Make a CAREFUL citation of all your sources. Make friends with the librarians and court house employees, so that you have a personal contact when you return. You may want to purchase a copy of the local phone directory for use at home.