

Hidden Niches on the Internet

Jan Johnson 425-957-3571

My single best bit of advice that has brought me the most results is learning how to best use search engines and then using them creatively.

Reduce your number of Hits! I tend to use Google: www.google.com I used to sometimes have thousands of what are called "hits" when I did a search. So narrow down your results by using the hints below!

Use a **+** (**plus sign**) before any word & it requires that word to be found.

If you use **"(quote marks)"** around, say a name, (e.g. "Janet Johnson"). This will require most search engines to find that particular set of words in that order.

If you type in **+"Janet Johnson"** and you discover a lawyer in Boston with that name, and lots of her hits so that you end up with 356 entries to examine, get *more* specific and use the **- (minus sign)**, like this: **+"Janet Johnson" - "law offices"** then all of the Boston lawyer's pages should be gone and you will be left with a manageable amount of hits to search for your Janet Johnson.

When searching for a particular person I do it like this: **+genealogy +"Janet Johnson"**

Or: **+"Janet Johnson" +"Bellingham, WA"**

With a more unusual name you can search for **+Allyn +obituaries**. Or **+Allyn +Obits**. Or **+Allyn +Obit** Get it? Be creative!

Hint: When using a form never use exact year, use "range".

Female Names Search for women using their married name as well as their maiden name. Or search for their husband's name and their given name with no surname. Searching for mothers, rarely use a surname. Women can have other surnames, marriages you knew nothing about, or may never have used their maiden name in reference to their marriage.

LDS/Utah names Search for your ancestor by using their initials. "L.J. Halling" instead of Lars Jensen Halling. Or search for them by using their initials and the name of the town, without the county and state. **+"LJ Halling" +Mantua**. And I've discovered family in places I never knew they'd been, by using their initials and the name of the county they lived in! I've found BONANZA'S using this simple device and not only for Utah, but *especially* in Utah!

Can't find your relative? Then search for his brother, his sister, or his cousin. Families quite often stuck together, sometimes where I've found an ancestral uncle with an unusual name, I've also found my common named ancestor.

Use Libraries across the nation I have used libraries and Historical societies across the nation to help me. Usually if I begin by telling them what I know (a paragraph or two – at most!) they are often willing to tell me what they also know. Bob, the 2 Margarets, Liz, and Caroline are people I've never met but who know my genealogy well and have helped me immensely. I look up libraries online and then write a very friendly e-mail asking about their part of the country and records, not usually about desiring genealogy help. They will send tons of info. about "their" part of the country. Then they get interested in helping me and then the rest of the genealogy info. I desire ends up coming my way!

Favorite Sites I Use

For those of you more experienced, don't groan, **Cyndi's List** www.cyndislist.com is an almost endless source of information. You can search her pages for hours.

Scroll down to the U's to **United States Index**. Click on the state you are interested in and poke around until you find the county and resources you are interested in. You can join mailing lists of others searching your localities by getting on their mailing lists.

On Cyndi's main page scroll down to: **Surnames, Family Associations & Family Newsletter** Click on the letter for the surname you are searching for. I've been very fortunate finding distant cousins who have been quite helpful, especially with surnames from specific locations.

Cyndi lists **Newspapers** but they are often current papers or limited archives. This can tell you how long the paper has been in publication and then you can go to microfiche archives in huge genealogical libraries and look for what you want.

Military can be useful if you know you had say a family member serve in the Civil War from a specific state.

Professional Researchers, Volunteers & Other Research Services is where I go for each specific state. Find: **Random Acts of Genealogical Kindness** People are listed who are willing to look things up. They have records in their homes, or will go look up public records, even to cemeteries to take photos of headstones for you! You can e-mail them and may not hear back for a month or two, but no one has ever let me down. Tell them every bit of info (not ideas or hunches) on the person or immediate family you're researching. These volunteers have given me much more than what I've asked for (at times) and sometimes will recommend where to search next. Be sure to read the rules for how to use this source and *follow the guidelines!*

And need I say it? Be extra polite and grateful for the service they are offering.

Queries, Message Boards Surname Lists, is next. Type in your surname and see what shows up and who else is searching. I have been very lucky using this and have also found nothing.

Under each state find: a system called **USGenWeb**. Each *GenWeb* site is run by a different person with their own ideas. Some are easier to use and/or read than others.

Other free sites I use on a regular basis

Of course, LDS FAMILY SEARCH <http://www.familysearch.org> with new format and info!

I happen to have had a lot of luck through, Gen Circle's <http://www.gencircles.com/globaltree/>

This site depends on who has put their own databases online.

BLM land: At the close of the Rev. War, several of the original thirteen states claimed land westward to the Mississippi River. Lands were ceded to the U.S. [Gov.in](http://www.gov.in) 1780 and ending in 1802. The ceded areas comprise the Public Domain of the United States. All states, *except the Original Thirteen, Hawaii, Kentucky, Maine, Tennessee, Vermont, West Virginia and Texas* are Public Domain States: <http://www.blm.gov/offline/>

AND ... the most amazing thing, is that even though you have searched the internet, by next year, everything will have changed, more information will have been added for each location, more databases will be online on each site and more records will have been made available. So everything you searched for this year on the Internet, should be searched for again next year!

Top Ten Genealogy Mistakes to Avoid

There are ten key mistakes that you will want to avoid in order to make your search a successful and pleasant experience.

Mistake #1: Don't Misspell the Word Genealogy

Mistake #2: Don't Trust Everything You See in Print

Just because a family genealogy or a record has been written down or published does not necessarily mean that it is correct.

Never make assumptions about the **quality** of the research done by others. Anyone can make mistakes, including certified genealogists.

Most printed genealogies are likely to have a minor error or two, and some are completely off base.

Books which contain transcriptions (cemetery, census, wills, courthouse, etc.) may be **missing vital information**, may have **transcription errors**, or may even **make invalid assumptions** (i.e. stating that John is the son of William because he is the beneficiary of his will). **Always** take the time to **verify** the information found in books with the primary source, if possible.

Mistake #3: We're Related To... Someone Famous

While this may be true, **don't jump to conclusions** and begin your research at the wrong end of your family tree! You need to start with yourself and work your way back to the "famous" ancestor.

The search to prove your descent from someone famous can be more fun than actually proving the connection!

Mistake #4: Don't Be Satisfied With Names and Dates

Genealogy is **about much more than how many names** you have found or **how far back** you've traced your family, you should get to know your ancestors. What did they look like? Where did they live? What events in history helped to shape their lives? They might not have found their lives interesting, I just bet you will.

Mistake #5: Beware the Generic Family History

They are in magazines, in your **mailbox** and **on the Internet** –

advertisements promising "a family history of [your surname] in America." Don't let yourself be misled. These generic family histories usually contain a few paragraphs of general information on the origin of the surname (usually one of several possible origins and likely having nothing to do with your family); a coats of arms (which were granted to a specific individual, not a family and certainly not for generations!); and a list of people with your surname (sometimes taken from phone books).

Mistake #6: Don't Accept Family Legends Without Question

Most families have stories and traditions which are handed down from generation to generation. **These legends** can provide many **clues** to further your genealogy research, **but** you need to approach them with an open mind. Just because your Great-Grandma Tilly says it happened that way, don't make it so! Carefully investigate the facts for yourself.

If you are unable to prove/disprove a family legend you can still include it in a family history, explaining this is family tradition and write down your conclusions based on your research.

Mistake #7: Do NOT Limit Yourself to the Current Surname Spelling

When you have trouble locating a specific ancestor, the first thing you should do is **search for variations** of your ancestor's surname.

The more you can think of, the better. Surnames are **commonly misspelled in official records**. People were **not as well-educated** in the past as they are today, and

sometimes a name on a document was **written as it sounded (phonetically)**, or perhaps was simply misspelled by accident. Many surnames have had the spelling changed on purpose to adapt to a new culture, sound more elegant, or to be easier to remember.

Mistake #8: Don't Neglect to Write Down Your Sources

Don't neglect to **write down** where you get your information, **name of the source, its location, and the date**. Often, genealogists find that they overlooked something important the first time they looked at a document and need to go back to it. Write down the source **for every bit of information you collect**; a family member, Web site, book, photograph, or tombstone.

Mistake to Avoid #9: Don't Assume Everything You Find On the Internet is Reliable

Always maintain a healthy skepticism. Explosion of genealogy info on the Internet makes this even more necessary. Even if the information you find is the perfect match and the answer to your genealogist's research prayer, **don't take anything for granted**. Until you can verify details they **should be considered clues**. Retrace the steps they took in their research.

Mistake #10: Don't Put Off Talking to Relatives

If only.... is often hear from genealogists who regret putting off visits with elderly relatives who have since passed away. Family members are a genealogists #1 source for clues, and often the only source for the stories which bring family history to life.

Visiting relatives should be at the top of every genealogists "to-do" list.

If you can't visit right now - send a list of questions or a memory book to fill with their stories, or get a relative or friend who lives nearby to visit with them and ask them questions. Do it now!