

## Tim's Tips on PA German Research

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I've spent several years doing research on my ancestors in Pennsylvania, mostly PA German (PA Dutch) and some English, Dutch, etc. I've accumulated a lot of knowledge that would have been nice to know when I started. Now I'm going to try to pass some of that knowledge on. Under various headings, you will find miscellaneous tips, addresses, etc.

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### Intro

I'm not going to cover all the basics. Sure you should talk to all living relatives (really!!) and take lots of notes. You'll miss a lot and not realize it until much later. Get not only names, dates, places, but also the stories and traditions that belong to your family. If you're really just starting out, go to the bookstore or library and get a book on general genealogy. I see *Finding Your Roots*, by Westin, Ballantine Pub \$5.95 and *Tracing Your Ancestry*, \$9.95 by Welmbold, Oxmoor House on my shelf and I'm sure there are other good ones.

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### On German names

The Germans used what I'll call a 'prefix' name in the 1700's and early 1800's (and earlier I suppose). The two common prefix names are John and Maria. The names were used mostly at the child's baptism and some later more formal documents and dropped in other situations. For example, the child baptized *John Jacob Conrad* would be known simply as Jacob Conrad in other less formal documents. The prefix form was written John, Johan, or even Hans. The actual name of *John* was usually written John, Johan, Johannes, Johs, Hans or Hannes. I haven't seen a John John and using the long form as a prefix such as *Johannes Jacob* doesn't generally occur. [I've since found an interesting article on this naming in the Fall 1995 (Vol 16, No 1) issue of The Berks County Genealogical Society, page 8. Here, in an article by Elaine D. Schwar, the naming practice is called *Rufnamen*.]

There were other compound first names such as George Michael, or George Carolus. For some reason, a prefix like George was more often retained in other documents. In fact, I wouldn't call those prefixes at all - in usage they were more like the first and middle names in use today. For girls, the prefixes Mary or Maria and Anna were used much like John above.

- Carolus, Charles and Carl are all the same in German
- Jurg and George are the same in German
- Duny was short for Anthony
- Bastian was short for Sebastian
- Baltzer was short for Balthaser
- Asimus was short for Erasmus
- Felty was short for Valentine (the German 'V' sounding like and 'F' anyways)
- Phronica, Euphronica, Fronica, and Veronica are the same in German
- Margaretha, Gretta, Margaret, etc. are the same
- Elisabetha, Elisabeth, and Elizabeth are the same
- Rebecca was a nickname for Margaretha
- Peggy was a nickname for Rebecca
- Hanna was short for Johanna.
- Dinah and Tina were short for Christina
- Baby was used for Barbara

- Sarah and Salome are *often* interchangeable

In order to separate the many girls with the same names such as Mary and Maria apart, the teachers used various pet names: Molly, Polly, Pally, etc. They are all equivalent to Mary, though sometimes they were given as the 'real' name.

In the early middle 1800's and afterwards, a middle name like that used today was adopted. Most often, but not always, it was the mother's middle name. Actually, it seems that simply the letter was used, like Jacob S. Conrad, and the middle name rarely shows up in print. In the latter 1800's, middle names were a little more free form and many 'wild' names were in vogue for both first and middle names.

It's not too uncommon for parents back then to 'reuse' a name. That is, if they had a child named Jacob Conrad who died young, they might use that name for another child born later.

However, I've never seen parents have multiple living children with the same name. That includes the above system. They might have children named Johannes, John Daniel, and even Jonathan, but they wouldn't have children named Daniel, John Daniel, and Johannes Daniel (the latter not really used anyway, just for illustration). You wouldn't name your children the same name, why would they back then? Apparently, names might have been reused when a man remarried, in which case two children would have the same names - I haven't actually seen this, but heard of it.

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### On spelling

Much has been written about spelling in records. The researcher needs to pay much less attention to spelling in the earliest records, since many times, the person was illiterate and the name was spelled phonetically by the writer (e.g., the minister). If it sounds similar, consider it, at least until you have a chance to study if it really is a different person.

Another hint, when looking up names in an index, don't just look at those pages that are listed, but also look at other pages in the same time frame. Many times, the transcription that you're reading has errors (did you ever translate old German names?). So look at the adjacent pages for people with a similar last name, but the same first name. (i.e., looking for Theodore and Veronica Conrad and find Theodore and Veronica Bonrad on the next page - write it down!).

The German vowels and vowel combinations vary wildly. Here are a few rules (other than these basics, get a good book on the German language including pronunciation):

- no silent vowels
- pronounce the second letter with ie and ei
- eu is pronounced like oy in boy
- an ending i and y are interchangeable (e.g., Fegli and Fegly)
- an umlauted vowel (2 dots above) is often written as the vowel followed by an 'e'
- the umlauts are dropped in many transcriptions of records (no umlaut key on the typewriter?)
- in many cases the vowels are so messed up in the records, check out just about any vowels with the consonants that you are looking for
- d, t and th are largely interchangeable (there is no 'th' sound like in 'the' in the German language! Remember your teacher telling you that Neanderthal Man was pronounced like Neandertal Man?)
- g and k are often interchangeable (e.g., Klock and Glock, Kramer and Gramer)

Last names often exist in two forms, English and German. The translation could depend on either the meaning (Schmidt to Smith, Heuman to Hayman) or the phonetic translation (Conrath to Conrad or Coonrodt). People

generally either changed the spelling to match the way they wanted it pronounced or they changed the pronunciation and kept the traditional form. In most cases that I've seen, the correct number of syllables is correct. That is, they didn't tend to leave off major parts of long last names, despite occasional wishful thinking of researchers.

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### **On church records**

There are many early church records in print. Some are available only in the historical societies. Others are for sale. I'd like to see a file with the main publishers with free catalogues made available (not me!). I'll put a list of some recommended books at the end.

Knowing which church records to search is a good start. As a rule, I generally try to find out where the person I'm researching lived. Use census or tax records to narrow it down to a township at least. Then, try to find which churches in that area existed at that time. Lastly, start with those most likely attended by your ancestor. Most of the early German's were Lutheran and or Reformed. Many of the other groups kept to themselves (e.g., Mennonite, Moravian, etc). For the 1700's, I'd save the English religions like Quakers and Presbyterians for last.

Don't forget to look at the confirmation lists. Many people leave them out. Don't pay too much attention to whether they were in the Lutheran or Reformed list (do write that down, though). My impression is that folks generally show up on both communicant lists and weren't all that particular which brand of religion they consumed. They probably leaned one way, but depended on whichever traveling minister was in the area at the time. Just my impression.

Anyway, children were often confirmed at around age 15. Sometimes a little younger, more often a little older. Sometimes several of one person's children were confirmed at one time. Some older folks appear in the confirmation list, and they are often identified as being older or married in the lists.

Don't forget to check the pastoral (i.e. Rev \_\_\_\_ ) lists. These were traveling ministers who catered to several areas (I suspect most were like this) and they kept a copy of their pastoral acts in their own books. Consider these sources in addition to the church guides:

- Rev Stoever-early 1700's Montgomery, Berks, Lebanon Counties and surrounding areas. (available from Family Line Publications listed below).
- Rev Boos-much the same as the Schwartwald Reformed Church records. Central Berks County in mid 1700's.
- Rev Schumacher-mid 1700's Lehigh, Northampton, Berks surrounding areas (available from Picton Press)
- Rev Helffrich-later 1700's Lehigh and western Berks Counties.
- Rev Luetge, Rev Meyer, and Rev Weber - late 1700's in Westmoreland Co area.

Plus many more. These records often include not only the names of the parents, dates, weddings, etc. but also where the pastoral act was performed.

If you're doing research in Berks County, get the map of early Berks Churches, available from the Berks County Genealogical Society.

Speaking of Berks Co, there are some handy little books available. There is a 5 volume index to births in Berks Co churches before 1800 and a 2 volume index to marriages. Handy books if you can find them.

A lot of the old church records refer to what were probably very important holidays in their time. Converting the name to dates can be pretty tricky:

- Trinity - the Sunday next after Whitsunday; so called from the feast held on that day in honor of the Holy Trinity
- Whitsunday (white sunday) - the 7th Sunday after Easter; a festival of the church in commemoration of the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost
- Easter - A festival of the Christian church, observed annually in commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and occurring on Sunday, the second day after Good Friday
- Good Friday - the last Friday in Lent, the Friday before Easter Sunday, observed as a fast-day in various churches, in memory of the crucifixion of Christ
- Lent - a fast of 40 days, observed by the Roman Catholic and other churches in commemoration of the fast of Christ. It begins at Ash Wednesday and continues till Easter, Sundays not being included

*(from Webster's Universal Unabridged Dictionary)*

So when is Easter? ...observed by the Western Church since the Council of Nicaea, on the Sunday **after the first full moon** following the **vernal Equinox**. It traditionally included a night vigil and the baptism of catechumens. (*The New American Desk Encyclopedia*).

So how do you know the date of Trinity?? I actually got my Windows Astronomy program and looked for the full moons and did the math, etc. A lot of work!! Anyone got a book with the dates or even better a program for this?? If you see Dom.2.Trinity, for example, that means the 2nd Sunday after Trinity - more math! [better, check out this on the internet: <http://cssa.stanford.edu/~marcos/ec-cal.html>]

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### Death dates

Remember, some records refer to burial dates rather than death dates. In the old days people were usually buried within 1-3 days. Remember, they didn't have embalming then, so they weren't going to let the bodies sit around a long time.

The dates on tombstones are often expressed in born and *died* dates (geboren and gestorben) or death date and age. I usually just use a month=30 days and seem to get the right date without actually looking at how many days are in each month. The birth dates on the tombstones are often a little off from the baptismal record. I usually expect no more than one thing to be off though - day, month or year. If you have to start really altering the dates, you better recheck something. Still, it's better to actually visit the cemetery, if possible, and take a picture of the (now deteriorating) tombstone. You may find that the date was originally copied and recopied wrong!! It's really neat to look at the old stones with the old artwork. It sort of reflects the atmosphere of the time. I figure that other than us, they didn't leave a lot around other than the tombstones they bought, so I take the time to check them out.

Many of the old stones are gone. A lot of the records came from a government project in the early 1900's in the WPA program (finally something useful with tax dollars!). Anyway, you may find records listing row and column numbers with an index, or simply an alphabetical list. Many times the versions in the books don't include all the relevant information on the tombstones, such as where born, number of children, when married, etc.

Many of the churches actually have a burial map in the church. Often times, it only covers the newer stones. So how do they know where to bury folks? I heard that they actually prod with a metal rod. If they hit something, better move the new site over a little. No kidding!

◁If you don't have PA death certificates for all your ancestors (those born after 1906), get them! They're only a few bucks and they usually contain the place of birth and death (you'll need to know the latter to order it!), the parents names, where they're buried, why they died, and other information depending on the form in use at the time. For a few more bucks, they'll do 10 year searches. The response times vary a bit. I'd guess they must put them in a queue, and loop through the years to print and send out - just a guess. See below for information on where to write/call.

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## Sponsorships

When you find a child's baptism, write down the sponsors!! Also write down all other records where the parents sponsor other people. And also their sibling's sponsors both ways. And even the sponsors of the sponsors!!

You have to realize that most of the sponsors (or witnesses, or whatever you want to call them) were relatives. By putting the names of one generation in a circle, you often find a connected graph. Each person sponsoring their brothers, married sisters, and eventually their children. Many times, the older sponsors of the first couple children are the grandparents, but not always. Expect this analysis to take a long time!!

OK, now that I said how great they are, here's the flip side. When a person moved into a new area, they didn't have any relatives nearby, so all their sponsors were just friends their age, local leaders, senior folks in the area, childless folks, church elders, etc. This is obvious, but be aware of it. I've seen some pretty suspicious claims of the mother's maiden name based solely on one sponsor!

One trap to consider is two brothers that marry two sisters. This happened, and your sponsorship circles will go around to the wrong families (you'll keep seeing the wife's sisters at both families' baptisms and think they're sisters of the brothers. Follow that??)

I found that the most significant sponsors are the earliest. The couple chose their immediate relatives (and probably close, well-liked relatives) first on the list of sponsors, then with more children, started picking friends and prominent folks. That's my observation. So if you're looking for families to investigate, pick the first or second sponsors. And if you find that the baptismal records are not available for the first or second child, you might be missing the key information you need.

Here's a trick that sometimes helps with old church records. Sometimes only the man's name is given (eg, *Jacob Conrad and wf*). But since folks often named the child after a sponsor, check the child's name. If it's a girl, often (not always) that is the same name as the sponsor's wife. Look at adjacent records to see if it was common at that place and time to name the children after the sponsors. You can verify it easily with male children and male sponsors. You may have to hunt around for several records from the same time frame to predict a wife's name.

I've also found that cousins show up as sponsors. Hey, they fall into the friend classification above and didn't realize (or care) that it would confuse the genealogists later!!

I've found that most of the time when a person is listed by themselves or with another single person, that person is most often single themselves. A married woman by herself is often referred to as *Mary Schmidt, wife of John Schmidt* to show she is married. Sometimes the fact that the sponsors are single is explicitly stated, but the fact that it isn't mentioned shouldn't be used to suggest that the people are married. A good starting point is to assume that sponsors listed by themselves are single or widowed.

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## On Naturalization and US Oaths

I've found two important lists available. One is the US Oath taken around 1777 by what seems to be immigrant heads of households. They are available in copied forms from the counties where the oaths were taken. This was a swearing of allegiance to the new country and was likely required to continue in harmony with the neighbors.

The other list is of naturalizations from the 1730's through the 1760's. Naturalization was required of the immigrant Germans and had implications for voting and land rights. For a good discussion of why they flocked to Philadelphia in the 1760's for naturalization, read *Hopeful Journeys* by Fogleman (PA German Society, Volume XXX). Basically, those foreign born had to reside in the country for at least seven years, and thirteen was common. The book of naturalizations by M.S. Giuseppi (which I believe overlaps lists in the PA Archives Series 2, Vol II) can be purchased Genealogical Publishing. It's a good small softback book worth having around.

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### On census records

Get them, all of them! Every ten years from 1790 to 1920, except 1890. Prior to 1850, only a tally by sex and age is listed for each head of household. With 1850 and on, names of family members are included. Write down not only the names, but the roll, page, line number etc., and also occupation, birth place, etc. You may want to come back to recheck an age or something and don't want to reread all those pages. In PA, there are index books available in libraries and historical societies from 1790 to 1860 (1860 books are rarer). Soundex indices are available from 1880 on (I think). Don't worry about soundex yet, other than if your looking in a big city after 1880, you better find a soundex index or mail/phone order the page from someone who does. For census records from a big city, I usually pay someone to look up that page. In areas where I have several relatives (direct and sibling) in one area, I just buy the census role. A book that lists counties and role numbers is:

Pennsylvania Line  
Research Guide to PA Genealogy and Local History  
SW PA Genealogical Services  
PO Box 253  
Laughlintown, PA 15655

This is probably the best book they publish, and I highly recommend it. It also contains dates/origins of townships and counties, township maps, and a lot of ads. OK, it ain't perfect, but there's a lot of good info.

For census orders I use:  
Deseret Census Service  
50 S Main St.; Suite #25-9  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84111  
1-800-4-CENSUS (1-800-423-6787)

Census roles \$15 (expect to wait), soundex search \$10, copy page \$9. Call for other info if you're interested (I'm a little upset - I've been waiting a long time for a backorder of roles - what are you going to do?). County libraries and historical societies usually have the roles of their counties and surrounding ones.

How do you read the role?? If you're patient, a strong light and an eye loop works. Or you can take the role to your local library. I usually use an eye loop at home so that I have more time to examine it. You can actually scan a good sized city on one role in a few hours on a motorized machine, so don't be afraid to manually look at the whole city for an ancestor.

Make sure that you look at the actual page and not just the typed versions. Some numbers are of questionable interpretation!

Don't take the numbers too seriously! People lied about ages (or just didn't care). Some numbers ended up in the wrong column. And all the people in a household are **NOT** relatives. You can see in the 1850 census that there are other children who lived with neighbors and friends or maybe just a family better able to feed them. Children were loaned out regularly, permanently, or just for the summer in the farm areas, though you may not think of doing it in today's society. If it happened in 1850, it certainly happened in the censuses prior to that, so don't invent or kill off children that don't make the numbers work out.

I'm not sure how much attention to pay to 'adjacency'. That is, if you're looking for Jacob Conrad's wife who's maiden name was Smith, and Jacob Conrad is listed next to a Smith in the census, write it down. I've found this relationship useful, but I don't think it's all that great of an indicator of relationship - probably more of a tool for getting a direction. In at least one case though, I followed the census taker down the road by comparing the listing to a property owner map and could pinpoint where an ancestor lived.

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### **On County Histories**

It seems that most PA counties have large fancy biographical histories published at the turn of the century. They usually have an index of the biographies in that section of the book (they also cover general county history). Each one varies in the amount and quality of genealogical information contained. So what happened was something like this: a prominent distant cousin of yours became famous as a politician or store owner or whatever. When the announcement went out about the new county history, these folks would pay a certain amount to have their names, achievements, and ancestors in the books. Great huh??

While there were a few errors, I've found most of the data to be pretty good. You'll definitely want to get second (original) sources though. A handy thing to have when looking at one of these books is an "Everyname Index to xxx Co". Often these indices were added later and often they are only found in that county's library or historical society. You may want to check around first for the existence of an index before spending too much time browsing. Here are a few of my favorites, for example:



- Northumberland - by Floyd. index available from Northumberland Co Historical Society. good amount of genealogical info. Includes word-for-word info from Montgomery's book below
- Berks - by Montgomery. not sure of an index
- Lehigh - several. an index is available for one of them at the Lehigh Co Historical Society
- Schuylkill - two that I can think of. One is a two volume black book. The other by a Beers. no index that I'm aware of.

You may notice that some of the county histories contain mostly county history, some mostly genealogical backgrounds of prominent folks, and some just highlight the great accomplishments of the prominent folks themselves.

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### **On county records**

There are lots of records available from the county courthouses. Some you need to visit and some you can write for.

I recommend either visiting the county and looking through various indices or getting a published index to the wills of that county (many exist). If you have the index number you should be able to write to the county and ask for a price to duplicate the will. You should understand a little about wills and such first.

If a person wrote a will, all is in order (relatively speaking). The will was often copied into a standard book in each county when the person died and the will was presented by the witnesses to the will. If the will was in German, it may have been translated then, or later, or recorded in the will book in German, or only recorded in English, or just not even copied down (I got one of these today from Lancaster County). The copy in the will book usually has a facsimile attempt at the original signature or mark. Some counties will also have the original wills available. You may have to pay more for the various language copies. I get them.

When a person died without a will, often Letters of Administration were written to someone, usually a relative, to take care of the estate. You can get a copy of the actual document, sometimes in the will book, sometimes in a separate book, but it will usually provide little more info than the index book, other than the location of the person at the time of death. Sometimes, it mentions the relation of the person, if any, to the deceased.

Don't forget to get copies of the wills of siblings who often listed their brothers or sisters as recipients or executors. It seems like they often listed people that they thought would be, perhaps, unbiased like friends and sons-in-law as executors.

There are also the records of the Orphans Court. This one is kind of strange. Many of the OC records don't deal with orphans, but rather with the selling of property. You'll find a lot of records in these books, but most of it is financial rather than genealogical. There are exceptions, and certainly you should check them. Especially if you know that minors were left behind (it could be just the father dying and the mother unable to support them). The other thing that I noticed is that they often appointed guardians for children even though the mother was still living. I'm not sure if this actually resulted in the children moving in with the guardian in this case, or if it was just to appoint a suitable male person to handle property and finance issues (you'll see that women didn't have too many rights back then).

I found that you can write to a county listing just the name and the year of death. They'll usually take the time to look in the basic will index for you and supply a price quote. Don't abuse this privilege. If you really want research rather than just a copy of something you know or suspect exists, don't write, get a researcher.

You also should check the land index and deed books. Check both the grantor (seller) and grantee (buyer) indices. Keep an eye out for the keywords Est (estate), et al (and others - many people), and Release. All of these may refer to the sale of land when a person died and the children or other heirs had to sign off as joint owners of the property. Here is a goldmine of genealogical data!! Don't miss it! You'll find information as good as or better than the wills. Often, the spouses signed for the land as well. And where the person was living was also listed.

Other land records may mention genealogical relationships - "to my children xxx" or "son-in-law xxx". Don't pass up this opportunity.

You'll also want to check out the marriages (late 1800's onward), birth and death records (late 1800's through very early 1900's). Later birth and death records (after 1906) can be found at the State Level. Contact:

Department of Vital Records  
PO Box 1528  
New Castle, Pa 16103  
412/656-3100 (touch-phone menu information on ordering, call!)  
<http://www.vitalchek.com/us/pa.html>

Remember, the death certificate of a brother/sister may list the parents, so if your ancestor died before 1906, get a death certificate of a sibling who died after 1906!

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## Revolutionary War Records

During the Revolutionary War, I think everyone was a patriot. Not to put these guys down, but my understanding was if you stayed instead of going to Canada, you pretty much had to serve. Still, it appears though, that each family only contributed only a few family members and not everyone served, at least at the same time.

The best place to begin is the PA Archives, which is indexed. There are a couple series that pertain mainly to Revolutionary War records. You may find your ancestor here.

One thing to understand is the way the militia was organized. Each county had a number of militia Battalions, with a number of Companies in each (often referred to by the commander, a captain, his name rather than a company number), each company from people within one township. The lists then break out classes. Some people mistakenly refer to a person as a Private 5th Class, as if the guy was on a scale where a Private 1st Class would be good, etc. This probably comes about from the modern US Army having ranks Private and Private 1st Class, the latter being a promotion.

Anyway, these classes weren't ranks, they were more like cycles that showed when the person would be rotated to 2 months duty. A different captain from the various companies would then take turns drilling men from one of the classes. Then a new captain and a new class. You may see either type of list (all classes in a township, or all members on duty). Berks County Genealogical Society also carries a book with those serving from Berks County. I doubt if these lists are entirely complete. You may still have a veteran in the family but proving it may be hard.

Some folks applied for pensions and there are indices that list both the application number (good idea if requesting a copy from US Archives) and another index that also includes genealogical extract info.

You may want to use tax lists to determine which township the members of your ancestor's company were from. Check the PA Archives tax list for a similar time period.

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### PA Archives

Back quite a few years ago, they decided to publish a huge amount of old stuff sitting around in the state. People must have typed for quite a long time to put together the PA Archives collection, a vast collection of books available at most PA libraries and historical societies. You should consult the new general subject index to see what county records are available in which series and volumes. I'm not going to go into all the records available - take a look at the master index.

Tax records: there are only a few years within each county that the PA Archives covers. You may find earlier or later tax records at county libraries or historical societies. Anyway, these lists are great because they show the township where the person lived, occupation, size of farm, etc. One thing to note is that sometimes the younger folks appear at the end of the list as "single men". Since they weren't taxed until they were of age, that is 21, you can get an estimate of when they were born by when they appeared in the tax list. Still, it appears to me that some of the the single men were skipped over by the tax collector. I'm not sure if young men living at home were just not taxed, or they hid in the barn??

As I said, the location that the person lived will help determine which church records to look through. Just like any other book, don't just look in the index. If your ancestor was in the tax list for only one year according to the index, check that township for other years. Look just for the first name if you have to, and you'll be surprised at the creative spellings that show up!!

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### Civil War Records

Yes, PA Germans served in the Civil War. Was your ancestor in the War?? A lot were. Does his tombstone bear a flag?? I'd guess most veterans have flags placed on their tombstones, but probably not all. Anyway, you really need to find out what unit(s) your ancestor served in. There is a giant 5 volume set by Bates that lists the members of each unit. You would spend a lot of time looking through these books and still probably miss him. An index was finally released, though not all holders of the original books have purchased the index. The index lists names and the units of the people, plus the page in the *new revised books*.

Many of the county histories list who in their county served in the war. That's where I got my leads. Then you can write to the National Archives to get both their muster roll records (list of their being present for duty, maybe physical appearance, etc) and their pension application (if they applied for a pension later which may list other units under which your ancestor served - that's where I got my info). The pension applications often have a list of their children, dates of their birth, wedding dates, copies of marriage certificates, etc. (all the above in my three). So don't forget to check both boxes. They will probably just pull out what they think are the most important sheets for the first mailing with an option to purchase all pages. It doesn't really cost much so I got all of them. If you're interested in more than just the names and dates, get all the pages. This is really a bargain!!

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### Standards of evidence

When I started out, I rejected a lot of obvious information because I didn't know what to look for and what was important. At least I wrote it down!! I think as you gain more experience, you know what leads to a conclusion and what doesn't.

The old rule of thumb was to have three independent sources of information to draw a conclusion. Well, that's a good rule, but if you have the dates from a tombstone, and the birthdate matches a baptism, and he was in that area at the time - wait, that's three records. Anyway, it's a good starting point. If you're not sure, challenge your idea and explore the alternatives. That's the key. Check the records on other people who could be the parents just to rule them out. Check census records and tax records for people with the same name. Make sure that records show the person was in the right place at the right time. It will save a lot of time in the long run.

Always go back to original source material, not just someone's family history. These second generation documents, while generally good intentioned, include the author's interpretations, biases, etc. and need double checked to the same standard as original data. You might feel good that someone 'proved' your ancestor was the child of kings, but just because someone wrote it down doesn't make it a fact.

I'd like to come up with some type of weighting scheme to refine the three sources of material. Some data is pretty solid like land records and wills. Other data is sort of incidental like baptisms and tax records. A mountain of the incidental evidence starts to approach the solid data. Wait a minute, I must have been watching the OJ trial too much...

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### GEDCOM files

GEDCOM is a standard format for exchanging genealogical information between computer users. You can view a GEDCOM file, but it isn't too readable. You need computer program that can generate/view GEDCOM files. These programs can be found in the computer stores as well as shareware versions from various on-line networks. I personally like Parson's Family Origins for Windows, despite a number of shortcomings. I've tried others, but think this is the best. Hopefully, the new version fixes some old limitations.

If you think you're going to be exchanging a lot of information, buy a program. If you might be downloading the work of others, same thing. I recommend it. After learning a few quirks about computers, you'll be glad you did!

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### **On on-line network requests**

Please use descriptive titles when you post queries on America Online, the internet, etc. I can't believe some of the titles such as "Smith, PA". There were gazillions of Smiths and after a short period of time, I stopped reading all but the more obviously relevant postings. I figure that even "Misc families, Tulp TwpBerks, 1780" is more likely to be a hit than the Smith posting. I'd recommend being as specific as possible, including last name, place, and time period. If someone sees that, they'll know if it's worth going further. And this is a courtesy to those paying by the minute to view these lists. That's just my thoughts - the better more thought-out request titles will probably get the most positive responses.

And in the body of the posting, don't just say "looking for John Smith of PA"!! Put in more details of the location, as best you know it, and anything else you know. It doesn't cost that much more to type in a few more details like "looking for John Smith. Lived in Pottsville, Schuylkill Co before 1820, moved to Eldred Twp around 1820, married Magdalena Snyder and died in this township in 1852. Born 1802. Looking for his parents probably of Brunswick or Manheim Townships in Schuylkill Co. John was of German descent." That kind of detail will really eliminate a lot of folks time reading and typing.

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### **Progress**

The easiest way to make progress is probably something like this:



- interviews, family Bibles, etc for currently known ancestors
- death, marriage, etc records from the state and counties for those living after say 1900
- census records going back to 1850. lesser dependence 1790-1850. it's tough bridging the gap from 1800-1850. also bridging the missing 1890 census
- church records all the way back. more dependence on them before 1850 (more readily available before then. probably most from before 1800 are in print and available).
- wills, land, etc records all the way back
- tax records before 1790

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### **Places to contact**

Family Line Publications, 1-800-876-6103, Rear 63E Main St, Westminster, MD 21157 Free catalog!! Good prices!! Specific limited subject matter in each book!! Get a catalog now!! (many PA church records available) (I hate when people offer books on wide ranges of areas, e.g. assorted marriages of the eastern states, or whatever. These books rarely deliver. Somehow, by mentioning a lot of names, the publisher wants you to buy these books that have lots of names but little chance of overlapping with your ancestors. Think how many thousands of people there were in PA in the 1700's and you're looking for a couple hundred. Just random hunting won't pay off. At least this place has books that, if you know where you're looking, it's more likely to be a hit. And the catalog is free! A really genealogist's source finally.)

Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission catalog. Free. Publications Sales Program, Friends of the PHMC, PO Box 11466, Harrisburg, PA 17108-1466. 717/783-2618. Catalog lists many books on the history of PA, various books on ethnic cultures, history of the counties map (get it!), Guide to the PA Archives (get it!).

PA German Society. They have a few church records available including the Christ Church in Stouchsburg, Berks Co, although it's on the border near Lebanon County and has many folks from there. Write for info: PO Box 397, Birdsboro, PA 19508. (I think this is the old address - they're in Kutztown now)

Maps:

Pennsylvania Atlas and Gazetteer. You need this!! all counties, townships, rivers, creeks, towns are shown. 96 huge pages. most rural roads in case you want to visit the area. DeLorme Mapping Co, PO Box 298, Freeport, Maine 04032. \$14.95 in stores.

Concise Historical Atlas of Pennsylvania. A good historical overview. Temple University Press. don't remember the price, but I'd guess in the \$20's.

Metro Atlas, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia Co's. Over 200 pages including street index. This has probably every road, church etc in those counties. Many cemeteries marked. Useful for this area. Franklin Maps, 215/265-6277. \$24.95 in stores.

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Me - Tim Conrad, email: tconrad63 (at \_) netscape.net

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Closing:

OK, that's all I know (not much). Let me know if you have any tips I should add or what I missed. If you find this useful, let me know and I'll update it, maybe polish it a bit, and resubmit it. Good luck!

Tim

See also:

[Tim's Home Page](#)  
[Pennsylvania Dutch Dialect Project](#)

March 2004: moved from <http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Plains/3816/> to here. Geocities wouldn't let me in there to update the contact information. Now the web page is gone. Reborn here (unchanged).

January 2011: moved from [www.geocities.com/trconrad2001](http://www.geocities.com/trconrad2001) to [home.ptd.net](http://home.ptd.net). Unchanged content. I had moved the PA Dutch info here earlier, but somehow missed this page. It's unfortunate that they dropped the free geocities concept, which I thought was a nice contribution to the internet.