

STUCK? Tips for getting Unstuck!

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I NAMES

A. Phonetic variations.

1. What happened?

- Illiteracy of informant.
- Accents affect spelling.
- Spellings not standardized for many years.
- Different alphabets, additional letters and diacriticals.

2. What to remember:

- Census takers or record keepers may not be local and may not be familiar with local pronunciation and spelling customs.
- Close your eyes and sound out the surname you are working on. What possible accents could affect this situation?
- Consult language guides and native speakers for clues.
- Use care with alphabetical indexes - you could miss your name.

B. Use of nicknames and diminutives

- Standard.
- Unusual

C. Multiple given names.

- Ethnic traditions
- Multiple marriages

D. Sources of surnames :

1. Patronymic: From father.

2. Place names: From residence or nearby geographical feature.

3. Profession or occupation

4. Descriptive

E. Translated names: given and surnames.

F. Altered names - Shortened or Americanized for ease.

II PLACES

A. Phonetic spellings and variations.

1. Language/accent.

2. Dialect

3. Ellis Island Effect: Nothing in writing when came to U.S.

4. Giving foreign country's name for self .

B. Birthplace vs. residence confusion.

1. Are we a good witness of our own birth?

2. Census and immigration records may not be clear - how were questions asked?

C. Name of the nearest large town or city often listed instead of actual small village.

- Most common with immigrant ancestors.
- Name of place they last lived or from which they emigrated.

D. Obscure or obsolete place names, or topographical identification.

- Historical gazetteers and period maps for accurate information .
- Civil and ecclesiastical boundaries may not be the same
- Misleading Locations - Farm Names, Townships and more . . .

E. Ignorance of geography on the part of the informant.

III DATES AND AGES

A. Dates and ages often given from memory or estimated: for a marriage record or census.

B. Errors in copying: Go for original records or recordings when possible.

C. Deception on the part of the informant.

D. What can we do?

1. When searching IGI and other sources look through a wider possible time frame.

2. When using census records remember that dates are subject to variation.

IV RELATIONSHIPS

A. Insufficient effort expended in determining true relationships.

1. Cousin used for a variety of actual relationships.

2. Brother or sister could be a mode of religious address.

3. Aunt - Have you ever used that term for a special non-relative.

B. Lack of investigation of terminology in use during the time period, legal and colloquial.

- Be careful with U.S. census records before 1880 where relationship to head of household is not specified. Check birthplaces to see if things add up.

C. Deception on the part of the informant.

- Illegitimate children - toughest case

In England and elsewhere there was some effort to identify the father so he could be made to pay child support, otherwise it fell to the local parish. This can be good, other times the mother named the richest man she knew, in hopes of better things for the child.

In England and Germany and other places there is a slot on the marriage record for father's name. If embarrassed, might invent name.

- Adoptive situations - very challenging.

NOTES: