Guide to FamilySearch

[GTV VIDEO LINK HERE](#)

Introduction

Whether you are a new or experienced genealogist, you should be aware of the best FamilySearch.org has to offer. This is *not* a beginner's guide to genealogy; **it is a user's guide to FamilySearch**. Below I will show you my top five reasons to use Family Search as part of your family history research methodology, regardless of if you are an Ancestry, MyHeritage, FindMyPast, or even a WikiTree fan, FamilySearch needs to be part of your research process... Here's why!

First Things First

Before we dig into the juicy good stuff, you need to know the following (if you are not already aware):

- Membership is Free! All you need is an email address.
  - o No, they won't send you ads. I have never gotten an ad from them.
  - o You can get notifications of records they have found for your ancestors, but these notifications can be turned off.
- It is sponsored by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
  - o You don't have to be a member of The Church to use the services and or contribute your genealogy on FamilySearch.
- The FamilySearch tree is one giant collaborative tree.
  - o Therefore, everyone is trying to connect to the world tree.
  - o Other members are adding information, data, records, photos, and editing the same ancestors you are working on.
    - ▪ Don't fight it, embrace it.

For the basics on how to get started and add people to your tree, see this episode (2019) called "[The Inside Scoop at FamilySearch](#)." In that episode, Courtney Connolly from FamilySearch shows you how to get started. Click the image to see that episode.

In this handout & episode (2021) "The FamilySearch Guide," I'm showing you the cool features that you want to make sure is part of your regular research process.


GenealogyTV.org   **YouTube.com/GenealogyTV**

#1 Unique Tree Charts

1. The Family Tree Fan Chart (my favorite)
   a. Use the Fan Chart, set it to the max generations to see as much of your tree as possible.
   b. Use the teeny tiny fan to move the ancestors into the center of the fan chart.
   c. Invert the colors to make it easier on eyes after a long day of researching.
   d. Use the various Fan Chart options to show Birth County, Sources, Stories, Photos, and Research Helps to visualize your tree at a glance.
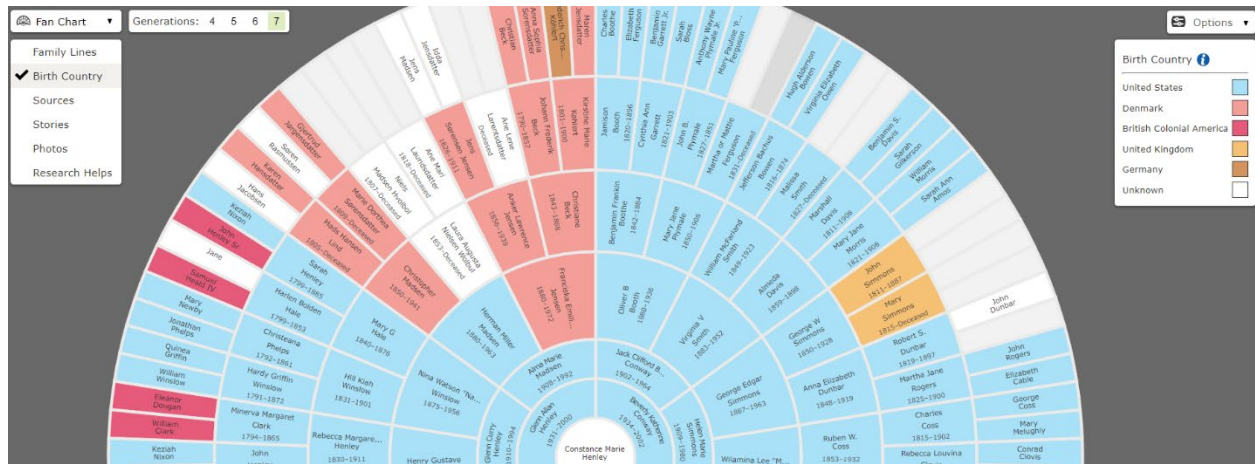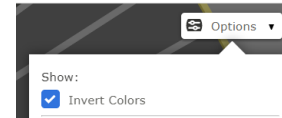
Landscape Tree (Direct Ancestors, shown in dark mode)
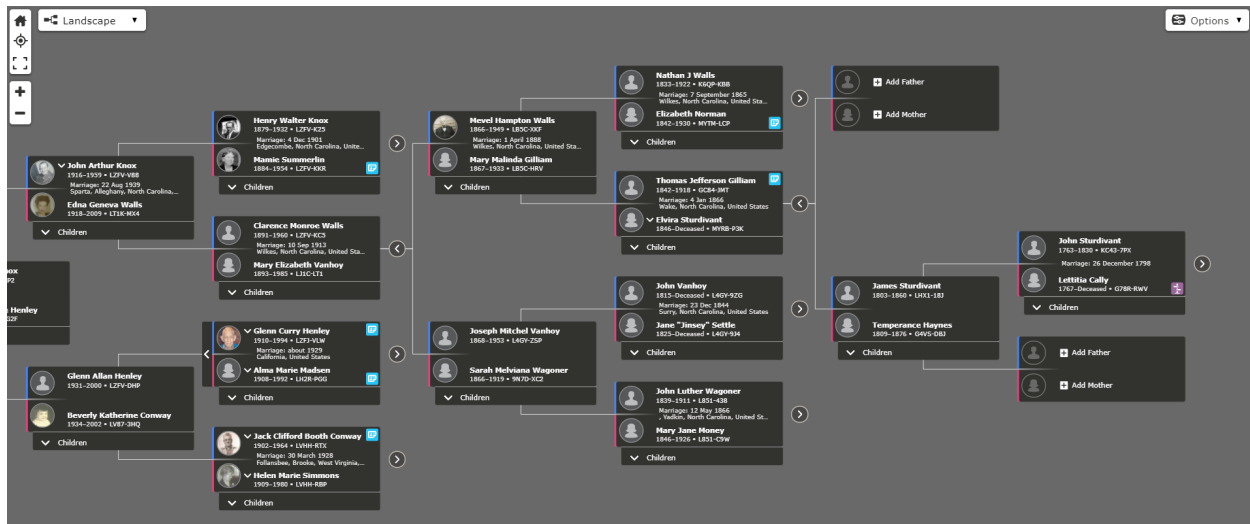
Everyone has this tree, but remember, this is a collaborative tree. While it shows your ancestors, others are working on these ancestors too.

Descendancy Tree

This is great for doing your descendancy research when trying to find those living cousins or DNA matches you have on another service. Remember, FamilySearch does not have DNA, but you may find those DNA cousins (say from AncestryDNA) here again on FamilySearch.

The trick to getting the **descendants** of an **ancestor** in this view (on the right) is to go to the Fan Tree view (shown on the left), bring the ancestor you want the descendants of, into the center of the Fan Tree first, as shown above, and then change the tree view to "Descendancy."
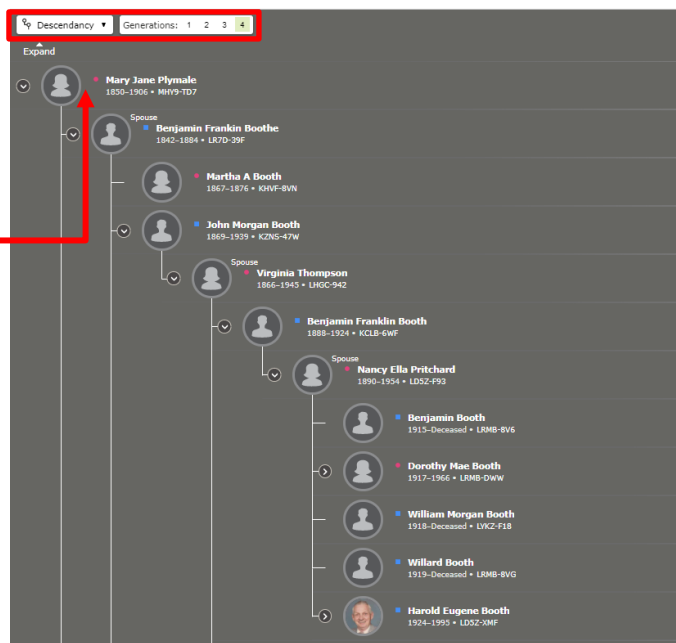
#2 The FamilySearch Wiki

The FamilySearch Wiki is my first stop when asking "Where can I find..." just about anything. The best way to research the FamilySearch Wiki, is to do so by location.

How to Search the Wiki

1. From anywhere on the platform, click on Search and drop down to Research Wiki.
2. Click the continent in which you are researching.
3. Drill down into the location in which you are researching. Keep in mind that if you drill in too far, you may reduce your results too much, thus unable to find what you are looking for. For example, the state level records versus the county level records. Search both the higher-level

state records, and lower-level county records. Also keep in mind neighboring counties, may also have what you seek.
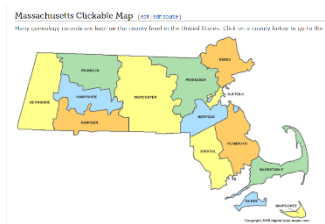
4. From the state level, scroll down and you can see a map of the state. You can then drill into the county, by clicking on the county in the map.

There is a ton of information on the Wiki. Be sure to look at the right hand side. For specific record types and where to find them.

I recommend right clicking each link you wish to explore and "open in a new tab," to preserve your original Wiki list. Then as you exhaust your research on each tab, simply closed the tab.

#3 Record, Records and More Records!

The experts differ on this statistic, but I was once told by FamilySearch that the records available on Ancestry versus FamilySearch are 90% different.

FamilySearch prides themselves on having a large collection of vital records (birth, marriage, and death records). I have found vital records on FamilySearch that I have not been able to find anywhere else.

The great part about finding records on FamilySearch, is that they are free. FamilySearch goes out of their way to acquire record sets and make them widely available to the world at no cost. Therefore, before paying for or ordering any record, check FamilySearch to make sure it's not already there for free.

How to Search Records

Option 1
Go to Search and drop down to Records. Fill in the name and any information you have about your ancestor. You do not need to fill in everything. An event with an approximate date and place will do. For example, Name, an estimated birth year and approximate birthplace will suffice in most cases.

Option 2 (my favorite)

Go to the FamilySearch Wiki, drill down by location as instructed in the FamilySearch Wiki section. Then search individual record sets, based on your research question, for your target ancestor.

By doing it this way, you are not only focused on your research question, but also your target ancestor and specifically the records that might answer your research question.

In the example below, I have drilled down to Albany County, Wyoming and then clipped just the record sets for Land and Property Records. As you can see, these record sets listed in the Wiki are referring you to Ancestry, and the Bureau of Land Management. The Wiki will provide a hyper link and which sites are free and which are behind a paywall. You can then follow the links to search those records.

Land and Property Records [edit | edit source]

Land and property records can place an ancestor in a particular location, provide economic information, and reveal family relationships. Land records in

See Wyoming Land and Property for additional information about early Wyoming land grants. After land was transferred to private ownership, subsequent
*Online Land Records*

- Land Patent Search⧉ - index to federal patents and homesteads on the Bureau of Land Management⧉ website, some images available
- **1796 - 1907** - U.S. General Land Office Records, 1796-1907⧉ at Ancestry⧉ - index, info taken from Bureau of Land Management website
- **1863 - 1908** - U.S. Homestead Records 1863-1908⧉ at Ancestry.com⧉ - ($), index and images

# #4 Follow Ancestors & Adding Labels

Following Your Ancestors

Following ancestors on FamilySearch is one of my favorite tips. When you click on the "Follow" star in any ancestors mini or full profile, you will get weekly notifications if someone has updated one of the ancestor's you follow. This can be very helpful if someone has uploaded records or images that you might be interested in knowing about.

To see all those ancestors' you "follow," simply click the Family Tree tab at the top of the FamilySearch website and drop down to Following.
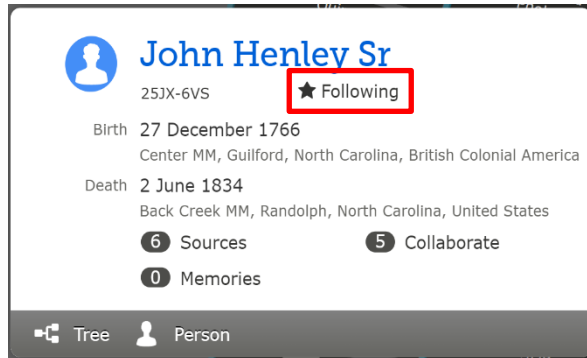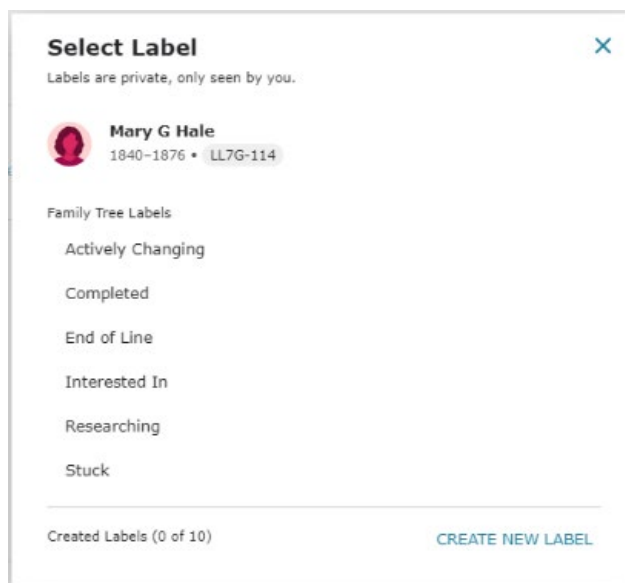
Adding Labels

When you "follow" an ancestor, you will be invited to add a Label in the lower part of the frame.
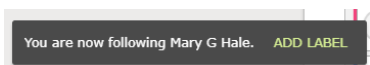
This appears to be a new feature, and I've not been able to find the ability to add a label anywhere else.

#5 Search Genealogies

This is often a forgotten resource. This is a collection of genealogies from a variety of sources, but not necessarily ingested into the world collaborative tree at FamilySearch. It has a searchable database by clicking on the Search tab and dropping down to Genealogies. Make sure you don't forget about this resource.