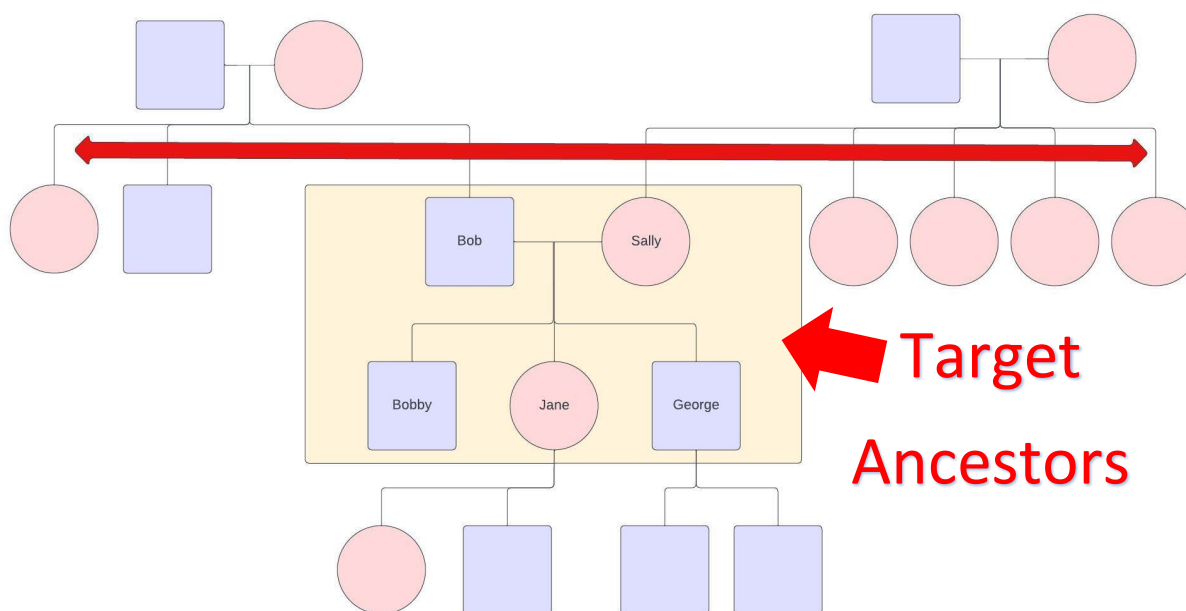


How Many Ancestors Do You Add to Your Family Tree?

How far and wide do you go with your family history research? How many ancestors do you add? Do you add all of the siblings, great uncles and aunts? These are questions I hear a lot. It all depends on your focus and your research questions. Let me explain...



Let Us Focus

The reality is that how many people you add to your tree is a personal choice. However, if you want to learn the right way to do genealogy research, then you need to research all those people (ancestors) who may help contribute to the solution to your research question or problem.

What does that entail? To use a phrase from the Board for Certification of Genealogists (BCG), let us talk about "Reasonably Exhaustive Research." Reasonably Exhaustive Research is the first of the Genealogical Proof Standards created by the BCG.



“Reasonably Exhaustive Research ensures examination of all potentially relevant sources. It minimizes the risk that undiscovered evidence will overturn a too-hasty conclusion.”¹

So, how does that relate to our question about how far and wide do I go with my research? It totally depends on your research question.

Let us figure out by working through the following steps for your “Target Ancestor.” I call them Target Ancestors to help you stay focused on one person or family unit at a time.

Research Question

All professional and serious researchers begin with a research question. This helps us focus on one objective at a time. Who are you focused on? What do you already know about them? Create a who, what, where, when and or why question for the one person you really want to know about. Feel free to be specific. Cite your source for what you know in your research question if necessary.

For example, “Charles Booth (1682-1713) died in Chester County, PA and was married to Elizabeth Conway in 1705 in Delaware, PA. Quaker records show evidence of their marriage and estate records prove his death. No records have yet been found revealing where Charles Booth was born. Where was Charles Booth born?”



What Do You Already Know?

It helps to lay out in chronological order the records you already have in your Research Notes. Research Notes are key to solving research problems, outlining all records found, documenting sources, and helping you to think logically about what you have and don't have.

What Don't You Have?

Once you have listed what you have in Research Notes for your Target Ancestor, it is time to identify what you don't have. This is also known as a Research Plan. While it might be obvious that you don't know where someone was born (per my research question), we need to look at every possible record for evidence of his birth. When thinking about an ancestor's entire lifetime, **what don't you have?** Think about life events and more. Birth, Marriage, Death, Burial, Children, Property... the list goes on. Write it down in a Research Plan, then research the plan.



“Plan Your Research and Research Your Plan” – Connie Knox

1

For a good list to help you get started, go to the FamilySearch Wiki or the Card Catalog on Ancestry and see the categories. Alternatively, you can pick up my [Records Checklist](https://www.genealogytv.org/handouts/records-checklist) at [GenealogyTV.org/Handouts](https://www.genealogytv.org/handouts/records-checklist) to give you some additional ideas.

Create a list of records you seek.

Family & F.A.N. Club members.

Family

Family, for the sake of this discussion, will include parents, children, and siblings.

F.A.N. Club members

F.A.N. is an acronym for **Friends, Associates, and Neighbors**.

This was a strategy created by Elizabeth Shown Mills wherein a researcher goes beyond family to research those who regularly touched the lives of our ancestors to seek additional information about our ancestors, help tie records together, and weave the fabric of the community in which our ancestors lived.

By researching the Family and F.A.N. club members, we will often find additional records that mention our ancestors. For example, it might be a sibling's record that leads us to how the entire family immigrated from Ireland in the early 19th century.



Evidence & Conclusions

Once you gather all the records, you'll want to compare them examining the data within. This is known as **Evidence Analysis** which is another skill in itself.

You'll then resolve your Research Question in a conclusion. Sometimes this is in the form of a positive result or a negative one.



Finally, you'll add your conclusion to your **Research Notes**. Yay... yes... You're doing Research Notes. I knew you'd come around. 😊 You will find victory in creating proper Research Notes.

How Many Ancestors Do You Add to Your Tree?

How Wide Do You Go?

As far and wide (with as many people) as you need to in order to *resolve* your Research Question for your Target Ancestor. This might include parents, siblings, children, and members of the F.A.N. club.

While F.A.N. club members might not be family, you can add them as “Floating” members in your Ancestry.com tree. That is another discussion for another day. Beyond that, the choice is yours. Whatever you do, verify everyone with records or mark them as unverified.

Remember!

You’re working **backwards in your research and family tree**, so you might not have discovered the parents of your Target Ancestors just yet. Doing “Reasonably Exhaustive Research” on your Target Ancestor will likely reveal them.

Additional Resources:

- Floating Trees on Ancestry: How and Why <https://youtu.be/Jut4yld-UnY>
- Get Unstuck: Break Down Brick Walls; Learn Family History Research Skills (Previous Webinar) <https://youtu.be/gK0jzdrclE>