

# Effective Search Strategies on FamilySearch

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The [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org) website has great genealogy resources available to researchers. Knowing how to use the website effectively can help you find those elusive ancestors. If you can't find your family by typing their information into the search box, click on **BROWSE ALL PUBLISHED COLLECTIONS**, then choose the specific database you want to search, and try various search tricks until you find them.

The screenshot shows the FamilySearch website's search page. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for Family Tree, Search, Memories, Get Involved, and Activities. Below this is a secondary navigation bar with links for Records, Images, Family Tree, Genealogies, Catalog, Books, and Wiki. The main content area features a large banner for "Search Historical Records" with a search form. The form includes fields for First Names, Last Names, Place (City, County, State, Province, or Country), and Year (Birth or Death Year). A yellow "SEARCH" button and a "MORE OPTIONS" link are positioned below the form. To the left of the form, there is a button for "TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE SEARCHES". Below the banner, there are two sections: "Find a Collection" and "Search by Place". The "Find a Collection" section includes an icon of a building and a text box for "Collection Title". A large black arrow points from the "Collection Title" text box to a blue link labeled "BROWSE ALL COLLECTIONS". The "Search by Place" section includes a world map icon and a text box for "Find a Country, Province, or State", with a "BROWSE PLACES" link below it.

Keep in mind that not everything is indexed and part of the historical record collection. If you can't find them in the historical record collection, you'll need to search other parts of the website such as the catalog, images, or Research Wiki. The **catalog** will allow you to search by location, topic, etc. to find specific collections. Most records in the United States are organized at the county level, except in New England, which is often by the town. Once you choose your location and specific record collection, see if there is a camera icon next to the collection title. If so, you can search for your ancestors online just like if you were onsite at that repository. Some of these records are indexed, many are not. Search using **Images** is similar, but searches can only be done by location. The **Research Wiki** will help you find online collections on other sites as well as the website and / or contact details for local repositories whose records might not be online.

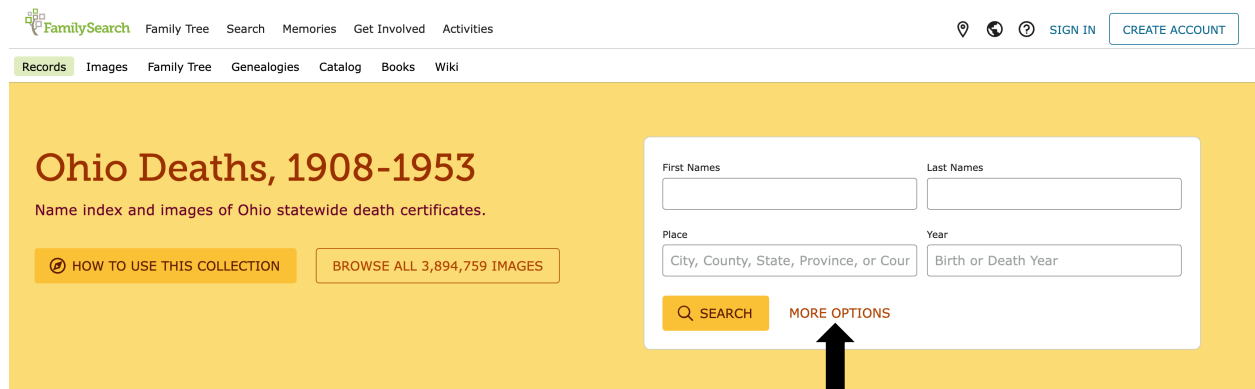
This screenshot shows the FamilySearch website's search page with a dropdown menu open. The navigation bar at the top includes links for Family Tree, Search, and Memories. The secondary navigation bar has links for Records, Images, Family Tree, Genealogies, Catalog, Books, and Wiki. The main content area features a large banner for "Search Historical Records" with a search form. A dropdown menu is open over the search form, listing the following options: Records, Images, Family Tree, Genealogies, Catalog, Books, and Research Wiki. The "Records" option is highlighted in green. Below the banner, there is a button for "TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE SEARCHES".

# SEARCH TRICKS

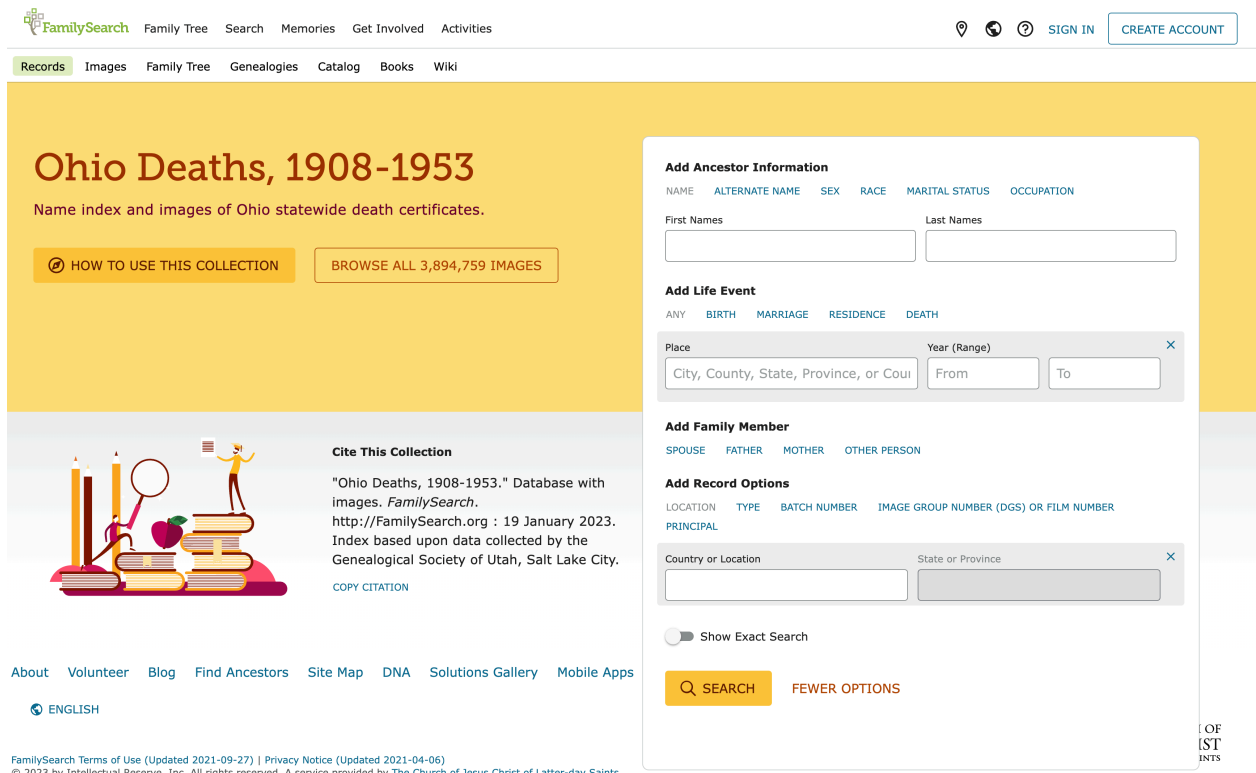
## TRICK 1: General Search

The general search is where you type in basic information to see what search results will come up. Many times, you can search this way and find your person fairly easily.

- Select your specific database
- Type in the surname and given name
- If you get too many hits, add in a birth/death/marriage date depending on the database you are using +/- 5 years



*This is the main search field for this specific collection. Type the name and place here for a basic search. Click more options for additional searching filters.*



## TRICK 2: Wildcard Search

Sometimes your general search won't work because their name is abbreviated, misspelled, or listed as a nickname. Wildcard symbols can aid in your search.

- Use the asterisk (\*) symbol to truncate the word and look for all variations after the asterisk symbol.
  - On FamilySearch you only need 1 letter before the \* wildcard feature
  - If you used ROS\* as a given name you would get Rosa, Rose, Ross, Rossina, Rosina, etc. and all variations on the given name starting with Ros.
  - You can also use this feature for surnames and combinations of the two as long as each name has at least three letters. So for a surname, WILLIAM\* would result in William, Williams, Williamson, Williamsson, Williamton, Williamham, etc.
- Use the question mark (?) symbol to replace a single letter within the word. It can be used multiple times in a word.
  - So Eli?abeth would result in searches for Elizabeth and Elisabeth
- Combinations – you can also use the asterisk and question mark wildcards in combination such as: S?l?n\*. This is really helpful if you have letters that are often interchanged with others and an ending that is not consistent.

## TRICK 3: Spouse Search

If names are abbreviated, misspelled, or listed as a nickname and wildcard tricks don't work, try searching for a spouse. This can be done a variety of ways in any type of database that used the surnames and / or given names of both parties.

- Tips for successful searches:
  - Use given name and surname of both bride and groom.
  - Use the given name and surname of just one spouse with just the surname of the other.
  - Only use the surnames of the groom and bride.
  - Only use the given names of the couple. (This will give a lot of search results, so it is best done if you also use the marriage date or location filters.)
  - Leave off the names completely except for either one surname or one given name, and search using the location filter and a date range. (This will give you a lot of search results, but you will usually be able to find them this way, if their record was part of the indexed records).

## TRICK 4: Surname Search

You can use this to search for a person or for spouses by just their surnames. This is helpful if their given names are abbreviated or misspelled. You can also use the surname search to search for all common surnames in a specific location. This will give a lot of search results, so you will need to use a date range too.

### **TRICK 5: Given Name Search**

This trick will work when the surnames are misspelled or mis-indexed. It is especially effective for finding married daughter's names when you don't know their spouse, but you do know their parents' names.

- Type in the given name and given an approximate birth date +/- 5 years
- If the name is common, add more filters to reduce the search results.

### **TRICK 6: Date Search**

Use this trick in conjunction with the surname search for even better results. It is really helpful to track people with common surnames in a specific location for specific dates. The only difference is you need to add the date range to the surname search.

### **TRICK 7: Other Family Members**

Sometimes it is helpful to look for other people who may be on the record for the person you are searching. This is especially true when using census records. You may be able to find the child, but not the parents for whatever reason. Use the above tricks, but search for other people in the household until you find what you are looking for.

### **TRICK 8: Parent Search**

Sometimes you want to find children of specific parents. Since parent's names are indexed when they are listed in the records, you can find their and their children's entries by using a parent search. This is immensely helpful for misspelled children or married daughters when you don't know their married name.

- Type the parent's name in the search filters and leave the surname in the regular search field. This should give you all the children listed for those parents for how you typed their names.
- You can also type the parent's names in the regular search field and list the mother's name as the spouse.

### **TRICK 9: Locality Search**

A locality search can be done with or without names. You will get a lot of search results if you search without names, but sometimes if you use it in conjunction with a date range, it is the only way to find the record. Locality searches are very time consuming, and it may be necessary to find another person's entry close to the time of yours and search the original records until you find them.

The residence filter is very useful when using census records to narrow down the search results, especially when used with the person's name and a birth range.