

# “BRICK WALLS”!!

DEADENDS, TIPS, & SOLUTIONS

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# COMMON DEADENDS

by [Donna Przecha](#)

**Disowned Children:** Finding disowned children can be very difficult because they often moved a long way from their original home to a completely different environment. Someone from Connecticut might move to Idaho or Texas for no apparent reason. With more national indexes becoming available, it is easier to locate these people. Since most census indexes are still on a state-by-state basis, you almost have to check each state as there is no predicting where they might have gone.

**Bigamy:** When a husband disappears, the wife usually goes through the legal process to have him declared dead after a certain period of time. You might encounter the family with the husband in one census and in the next find the wife listed as a widow. This would lead you to believe he died in the meantime and you would look for cemetery records, obituaries, wills and death records. If he simply disappeared, you will not find any of these and may need to explore court records for a legal document declaring him dead. Of course, he may not really be dead at all.

**Name Changes:** If you suspect a possible name change, be sure to consult as many legal or official documents as possible, such as pension papers, wills, naturalization papers or land deeds. Even if a man changed names he might think he had to include his "also known as" (AKA) name to be sure the transaction was valid, fearing the original name might come out at some point and nullify the action.



**Duplicate Names:** Sometimes a researcher looking through baptism records will find a couple who gave the same name to two different children. A look at the burials usually reveals that the first child with that name died before the second one was born. In some cases no such death is found. In fact, both children seem to live, grow up and produce their own records. This can cause the researcher a bit of confusion and reexamination of the records. For some reason — perhaps a lack of imagination? — parents will give children almost identical names. In one family there was a John and a Jonathan, and both lived to adulthood. Mary and Maria are also possibilities.

**Informal Adoptions:** Very often in the past, adoptions were very informally arranged. A woman might have a child that she really couldn't care for, because of health or financial reasons, while her sister might have wanted a child but was unable to have one. It might be agreed between the two families that the child would be given to the other to raise. No papers were signed or legal documents filed. Similarly, a foundling might be taken in by a family and simply raised as their own.

**Wrong Sex:** We have all encountered a person being classified as a male in one census and a female in another. This frequently happens with unusual names, or names that can be either sex, and usually it is just an error on the part of the census taker. However, there have been cases where children have been raised as if they were the opposite sex. Boys were dressed like girls when they were small and a mother who wanted a girl and was unable to have any more children might well continue that deception until the child revolted. Sex change operations were not possible 100 years ago but people could live as if they were the opposite sex. A woman might be especially tempted to masquerade as a man if she wished to be a soldier or a cowboy or follow some equally masculine occupation. Very recently a well-known band leader died and it was found that he, even though he was married, was actually a woman and no one knew.

**Race Change:** While following a family back through the census you might find a person who had always been classified as white, listed as mulatto, meaning a mixture of white and African ancestry. While we know the census taker often made mistakes, this might mean there is African-American ancestry in that line. Appearance played a big part in racial designation and when possible, many people of mixed ancestry would "pass" for white when they could.

Many people, especially in the south, have both white and black ancestry. Given the conditions and disadvantages under which blacks, even free ones, had to live, it made sense to be classified as white if at all possible. It made their lives and the lives of their families much easier.

**Facing the Impossible:** I would not encourage anyone to look for any of these extreme situations in his or her own family research, but if the impossible or the improbable appears, keep an open mind. If you come across one of these situations, this line may be truncated. Even if you do manage to work around it, it will take much research and documentation to gather enough evidence to prove what really happened. However, if you do manage to piece the whole story together, it will probably be the highlight of your family history!

# Brick Wall Genealogy Solutions

*A Family Heritage Resource*

<http://www.workingdogweb.com/brick-wall-genealogy.htm#GUIDES>

## **Guides & Lessons:**

- [Hit a Brick Wall?](#) - Cyndi's List guide to brick wall solutions
- [Enhance Research Skills:](#) a series of 32 lessons to help you find missing family information, with a "brick wall" section including:
  - [Common dead ends:](#) how to get around them
  - [Review information](#) you have for new leads
  - [Focus on facts](#) rather than on sources to help you find less familiar sources with what you need
  - [Find female ancestors](#) - best sources
  - [View the bigger picture](#) including siblings, cousins, neighbors, a whole village

## **Special Resources & Ideas:**

- **[Brick Wall Mailing List](#)**: Join this is a forum where you can post brickwalls, those elusive ancestors that you can find nothing on. And find new solutions.
- **[Afri-Geneas Brick Wall Forum](#)**: for advanced genealogy researchers to post brick wall problems and documentation
- **[Share Your Brick Wall Stories](#)** here and yours may be selected for assistance by Megan
- **[Discrepancy Charts](#)**: organize conflicting data in chart form to better see inconsistencies and determine what further research to do
- **[Locating Previous Overseas Home](#)**: a chapter in the free WikiBook on **[genealogy](#)**
- **[Rootsweb Surname List](#)**: post your surname and find others researching your name
- **[Keep an Eye on eBay](#)** for potential books or Bibles for your family or surname
- **[Avoid Genealogy Burnout](#)** due to the frustration of brick wall problems and use these strategies to get re-energized and continue the hunt.

# Articles

- [Brick Walls from A to Z](#): a clever list of 26 strategies to help including developing a biography, chronology or thinking of extended family
- [Brick Wall Research Tips](#): think creatively, be a detective, use a checklist for each generation, and much more
- [Using Collateral Lines](#) is a valuable way to solve brick wall genealogy problems. Find the vital records, obituaries or other records of siblings, cousins and more. Develop a detailed family timeline and work to fill in gaps.
- [Cluster Genealogy](#): research relatives such as siblings as well as others connected to the person you seek in order to have a research break-through on one who seems to have appeared out of thin air.
- [Cluster Genealogy](#) research also includes people such as neighbors and business associates
- [Dead End Genealogy Ideas](#): strategies to help you make further progress on a family line, such as learning about an ancestor's other marriages
- [Solve Genealogy Dead Ends](#) by making sure to obtain every document available because small details may open new lines of research, including name and age variations

- **Over Your Brick Wall:** learn a lot about the area the person lived, what documents are available, gain a feel for his or her life, and more tips
- **Brick Wall Research Tips:** review all your notes on the ancestor in question and you may spot a clue you missed the first time through, and try to find someone doing parallel research who might help.
- **3 Brick-Wall Busters:** tested strategies for getting past your dead-ends
- **Super Secrets of Successful Genealogists:** tips from the pros on getting past brick walls or dead ends in your family research
- **Clarify the Question:** improve your family research in brick wall and other situations by asking precise questions, writing detailed queries
- **Record and Document Everything,** even records searched that yielded no results.
- **Try a Fresh Perspective:** and be sure to check out family lines of cousins as cousins often married.
- **Revisit Neglected Lines:** with so much new information being placed online, you need to revisit a family line you may have set aside. Or reorganize your results and you may see something new.
- **Start Over** and review a family line with a new eye, thinking of possible new sources to check



- [Try Networking and New Sources](#) plus a can do attitude to solve brick wall challenges
- [Use Timelines & Maps](#) to visualize your ancestor's life, find holes in your knowledge and see where to direct your research efforts
- [Why You Can't Find Them:](#) name changes and misspellings, with many examples and strategies to get around this difficult dead end
- [Quaker Records Helpful](#) in solving a family brick wall genealogy problem, and [alternative sources](#) when you've researched the obvious ones.