

Murphy's Rule: Foundations of Genealogical Success (April 24, 7pm EST Zoom)



Overview

This presentation introduces Murphy's Rule for successful genealogy, focusing on fundamental resources that can often lead to breakthroughs in genealogical research. Through real-life examples, the presentation will demonstrate how following money, land, water, community, and faith of the people can unveil critical connections and trace elusive ancestors.

Goals of the Presentation

1. Explain Murphy's Rule as a comprehensive strategy for tracing ancestral connections and breaking down genealogical barriers.
2. Equip participants with practical examples to understand how financial records, land ownership, and community involvement reveal crucial genealogical details.
3. Empower researchers to apply "Murphy's Rule" in overcoming brick walls in their own genealogy journeys.
4. Encourage a holistic approach to genealogy by exploring an ancestor's socio-economic and cultural environment.

Key Takeaways

1. Each factor in Murphy's Rule offers unique insights—understanding an ancestor's finances, property, and community involvement can lead to breakthroughs.
2. Researching around an ancestor (community, faith groups, local economy) often provides information unavailable directly through the individual.

3. Murphy's Rule complements traditional genealogy and is especially useful in African American genealogy, where documentation may be limited.
4. Brick walls often dissolve by looking beyond the person and focusing on the community and resources surrounding them.

Examples and Applications

Follow the Money: Highlight wills, tax records, or merchant records showing an ancestor's spending, debts, or possessions.

- Example: A will from a wealthy ancestor listing specific heirs; probate documents detail estate distributions, identifying previously unknown family branches.

Follow the Land: Use land grants, deeds, and property tax records to trace family movements or inheritance patterns.

- Example: A land deed showing ownership of farmland adjacent to another family, suggesting a potential marriage connection or kinship.

Follow the Water: Proximity to rivers, lakes, or ports often influenced occupation, migration, and community settlement.

- Example: Census data showing family members listed as mariners or fishermen, explaining migration paths tied to major waterways or port cities.

Follow the Community: Research neighbors, shared community events, and group migration records to identify family connections.

- Example: A census or city directory showing neighbors with the same surname, suggesting kinship within a close-knit neighborhood.

Follow the Faith: Church records, baptism registries, or religious affiliations reveal important life events and community bonds.

- Example: Baptism records identifying godparents or sponsors who may be related to or close friends of the family.

Applying Murphy's Rule to Brick Walls

- When standard records are scarce, focus on community connections and neighbor records to build potential kinship.
- Use local economic conditions or land grants to hypothesize why an ancestor might have moved or changed occupations.
- Faith-based records may contain information not available in civil records, especially in communities with strong religious affiliations.
- Expand Your Search:
Look beyond direct ancestors to their networks

Community Research:

Neighbors, associates, and witnesses can provide leads

Environmental Context: Economic and social conditions may explain gaps

Case Study: Davis

- An ancestor disappears from records after a certain date.
- Using Murphy's Rule:
 - Check land sales indicating relocation
 - Explore church records in new areas
 - Investigate community migration patterns

Summary of Key Points

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- Finding Enslaved Laborers at UVA-Facebook-Freedmen Bureau Friday's
- Midwest African American Genealogy Institute:

<https://www.maagiinstitute.org>

- International African American Museum's Center for family History:
www.iaamuseum.org

Notes: