Reminders for Experienced Genealogical Researchers

Compiled by Susan L. Ennis ©2025 for Cranberry Genealogy Club

1. Make a research plan and stick with it. Re-visit it as often as needed. Be willing to make revisions as you encounter new records and after gaining knowledge.

2. Seek assistance and ask for help. We only know what we know! Others may have additional knowledge or more experience than you with a region, repository, or record group. Once you ask, listen actively to focus upon what is new to you.

3. FAN Club Research: Family/Friends, Associates, Neighbors
All of our ancestors had a network or people that intersected with their lives. These individuals might be listed as a witness on any legal document or in a wedding or other ceremonies/achievements. Browsing a census record before and after your ancestral family listing also can yield other families – the neighbors! – with familiar surnames.

4. Social history
If you are hopelessly stuck while researching a certain ancestor or a family, perhaps you should learn more about the place and time when they were living. Piece together information from newspapers, town or township history, migration, or occupational records. By learning more, the context of ancestors' lives becomes more understandable. This knowledge could lead to new places and new records to explore.

5. Seek original records, most likely one-of-a-kind and often NOT digitized online. This might involve changing your viewpoint about what is considered a record. Lesser known sources might only provide 1 or 2 facts; however, those facts might not exist in other record sources. Ask local experts and visit libraries.

6. Back up your work so far. If some items are only existent in a print format on paper be sure to start to digitize such items, especially if you paid for a paper copy of a record or certificate.

7. Storage – digital, print, and artifacts.
Keep heirloom items and important papers (such as an original marriage certificate) in a dry, climate-controlled environment. Consider purchasing acid-free folders, paper, or boxes for the most important items. Digital storage can change, so stay aware about updates. Example: audio or video recordings from family events – reel to reel, cassette, 8-track, CD, DVD, mp2, mp3, mp4 file, and more. If any paper item is readily available online, and free, find that item online, download and save it, and then discard the paper copy.

8. Keep learning. This includes learning about how to use new research tools. A current example of this is learning about Artificial Intelligence (AI) options, free or paid. Then practice using the tool(s), improving prompts and wording of prompts to achieve your goal. Connect with others doing the same tasks.