THE BRICK WALL BUSTER TECHNIQUE

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A genealogical brick wall is a question that is unanswered after exhaustive research. It may be an ancestor we can't research past or it may simply indicate a question to which we find no answer, despite many efforts.

In genealogy research, we often encounter brick walls and other complex problems. All the piles of research and files on the computer can feel overwhelming. (Don't worry, it's not you, and you're not alone!) You CAN master the "thought chaos" caused by all that data swirling around in your mind. All you have to do is interact with the research in a new way and engage in activities that transform you from a (passive) data *reader/collector* into an (active) data *user/thinker*.

We face multiple challenges

1. Complexity: Stacks of files, lists, narratives, etc. can become complicated to organize and sort.
2. Mental capacity: Our brains have limited short-term storage space. New thoughts have no room when we try to remember too much at once.
3. The wrong mode: Solving problems with our brains in passive mode instead of active mode creates frustration and a feeling of being overwhelmed.
   o Passive Mode = conserves energy, habit, reading, looking, no deep thinking
   o Active Mode = uses more energy, deep thought, analysis, physical contact
4. Electronic screens: Screens are a new technology that can keep us in passive mode and hinder deep thought. They are not interactive enough to encourage analysis and correlation.

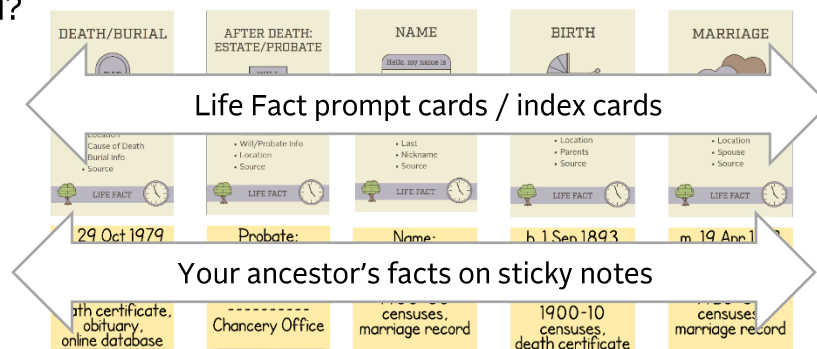## How do we overcome the problems?

- Change of mindset: Think of brick walls as an opportunity to work on a puzzle and a chance to have fun solving a mystery. See the brick wall as a yellow brick road.
- Stay focused: Write down thoughts and questions instead of trying to remember things to do. Write down your research question to help stay on track.
- Interact physically and simplify: Intentionally interact with research data to simplify it. Short notes to summarize a life fact works best.
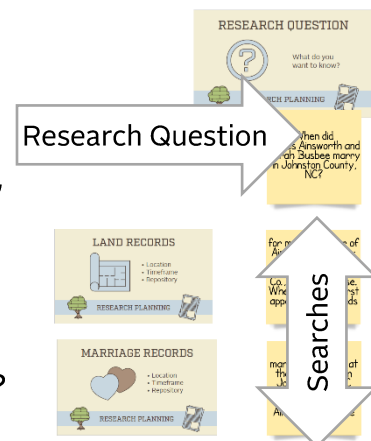
How do we interact physically and simplify?

- Use index cards and sticky notes to simplify the information.
- Handwrite the information.
- Arrange the notes so that you can see everything at once (similar to a family tree: lots of information reduced to something we can see all at once).
- Notes should consist of very basic information and sources.
- Rearrange the order of notes as needed.
- Physically interact with the data as much as possible (writing, moving the notes).

3 Steps to solving problems

1. Use index cards and sticky notes to assemble and study the ancestor's **Life Facts**. List their life's events in a horizontal line across the workspace. Index cards labeled with event types (like birth, marriage, death) serve as labels or prompts across the top. Under each index card, place a sticky note that concisely gives the information about your ancestor's life fact. Note the life events instead of records. Look for holes and conflicts. Do you need to research more? Is a life event "missing" from the event line? Do you see conflicts that need to be resolved?

2. **Plan** to conduct more research. Write out a research question and post it at the top of your workspace. Take your time. Consider typical research sources (land, death, birth, marriage, newspapers, tax records, etc.) Think about your question and note alternate ways to answer it. What searches can you conduct? How can a marriage be proved if there is no marriage record? If your ancestor is not on the census, what other records may prove their existence or residence?

3. Use tried and true **brainstorming and discovery** methods to work through the problem. Utilize sticky notes to track and collect discoveries and questions you develop. Try many different methods. Because you simplified the life facts in Step 1, you can now work through the best methods and strategies:
   o Mind mapping
   o FAN Club method
   o Collateral relative research
   o Transcribing to mine data
   o Critical thinking
   o Theory proving
   o Writing
   o Separating same-named people
   o Using what you DON'T find to your advantage
   o Re-examining EVERYTHING to mine data

When should this system be used?
- Using the system anytime you need to solve genealogy problems or prevent brick walls. You'll learn to be thorough enough to circumvent the most common errors.
- If you're just starting in genealogy, the system walks you through the research process.
- The system is *especially* effective for complicated problems. Use it for problems that can't be simply "looked up."
- This method is for you if you want to know what information to collect about your ancestor, how to plan your research and searches, and how to assemble or write up everything you find.
- The system teaches you to avoid the most common mistakes made in genealogy. Every genealogist has thoughts like "I wish I had done THAT when I first started," and this kit incorporates all those wishes.
- Equally helpful for big brick walls like "who was the father of James Smith?" and for smaller problems like "when did Stephen and Emily marry?"

Who can use the system?
- Genealogists of every level of experience benefit from the methods in the kit.
- Beginning genealogists are guided through best practices for researching.
- Intermediate and advanced researchers use the system to dive deeply into problems.
- The system teaches all researchers to be thorough, organized, purposeful, and careful to document research and sources.

What are the benefits of using this technique?

- The method is easy and simple.
- Your brain works in active mode (which is the mode it uses to solve problems).
- All research is seen at a glance (similar to seeing many ancestors in a family tree).
- Working physically helps maintain a train of thought over time.
- Gaps, errors, and conflicts are easily noticed.
- Notes can be manipulated and rearranged to see the information in a new way.
- Relationships are linked and correlated.
- The method automatically organizes research by life facts.
- A narrative outline is automatically created.
- Because you can see everything, you can plan and brainstorm.
- Like working on a jigsaw puzzle, you can leave your work laid out and work on it a bit at a time.

What if I want more information?

For more information, contact Kim Richardson at Kim@BrickWallBusterCards.com or call/text 662-995-0825. Kim loves to talk about genealogy and wants to hear from you!

Is there a discount code if I want to try the kit?

Absolutely. Enter **FAMILY** during checkout for an exclusive discount. Should you have any trouble, please contact us and we will help.

Notes: