



## The Art of Searching on FamilySearch: Finding Elusive Records on FamilySearch

For this and more information about searching on FamilySearch go to the FamilySearch blog at:  
<https://www.familysearch.org/blog/en/finding-elusive-records/>

If a basic search on FamilySearch.org is the only approach you use to find your ancestors, you are likely missing out on a lot of potential discoveries. The records you can find by performing basic searches represent only a small portion of what's available on FamilySearch.

In fact, 77% of the free historical records on [FamilySearch.org](https://www.familysearch.org) can't be found by searching. That's a lot of information about your family just waiting to be discovered! In order to tap into these hard-to-find records, you'll need to know how to use resources like unindexed image collections and the [FamilySearch catalog](#), as well as some more advanced search features.

### 1. Search the Family Tree (Find)

FamilySearch's family tree is the largest tree in the world. Because it is a collaborative tree and we all work together on our ancestors, you can often discover your ancestors have been put into the tree by a distant cousin of yours. So It is important when you are beginning any research to search the Tree first to see what is already known about your ancestor by others. To search the Tree, while in the Tree view click on **Find**.

The screenshot shows the FamilySearch Family Tree interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the FamilySearch logo and the text "Family Tree", "Search", "Memories", and "Indexing". Below this, there is a sub-navigation bar with "Tree", "Person", "Recent", "Find", and "Lists". The "Find" button is highlighted with a red box. The main area of the screen displays a family tree with several individual profiles. The profiles shown are:

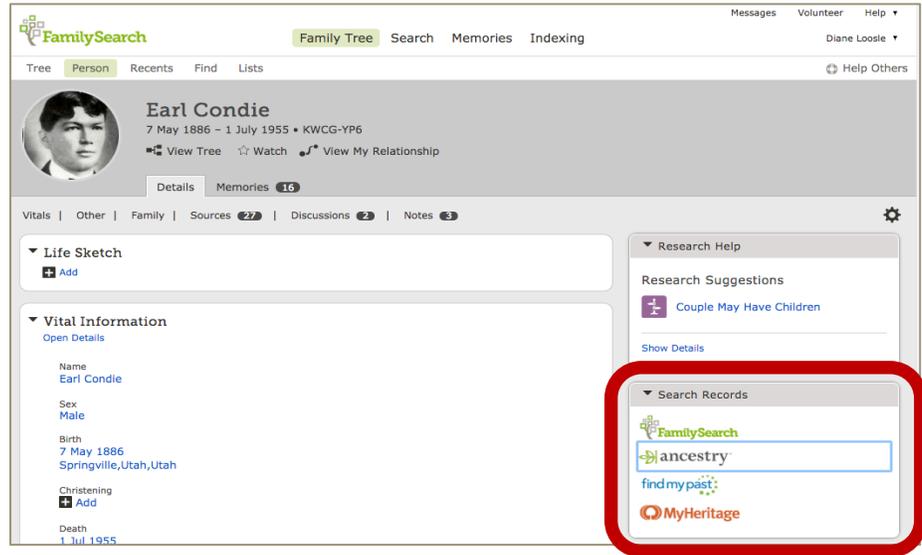
- Lee Packard Condie**: 1940-2005 • KWHD-9KV. Marriage: 17May1963, Utah County.
- Carol Laverne Wright**: 1943-2010 • KWHD-9KL.
- Rulon Packard Condie**: 1945-2018 • KW4T-B8D.
- Earl Condie**: 1886-1955 • KWCG-YP6. Marriage: 19 January 1905, Springville, Utah, Ut.
- Elsie Clegg**: 1887-1940 • KWCG-YPX. Children.
- Arthur Earl Condie**: 1905-1968 • KWZW-71M. Marriage: 23 Jan 1930, Salt Lake City, Salt Lake, Utah.
- Jessie Packard**: 1904-1993 • KWZW-71S.

There is also an "Add Spouse" button at the bottom left of the tree view.

## 2. Search Indexed Records from the Person Page

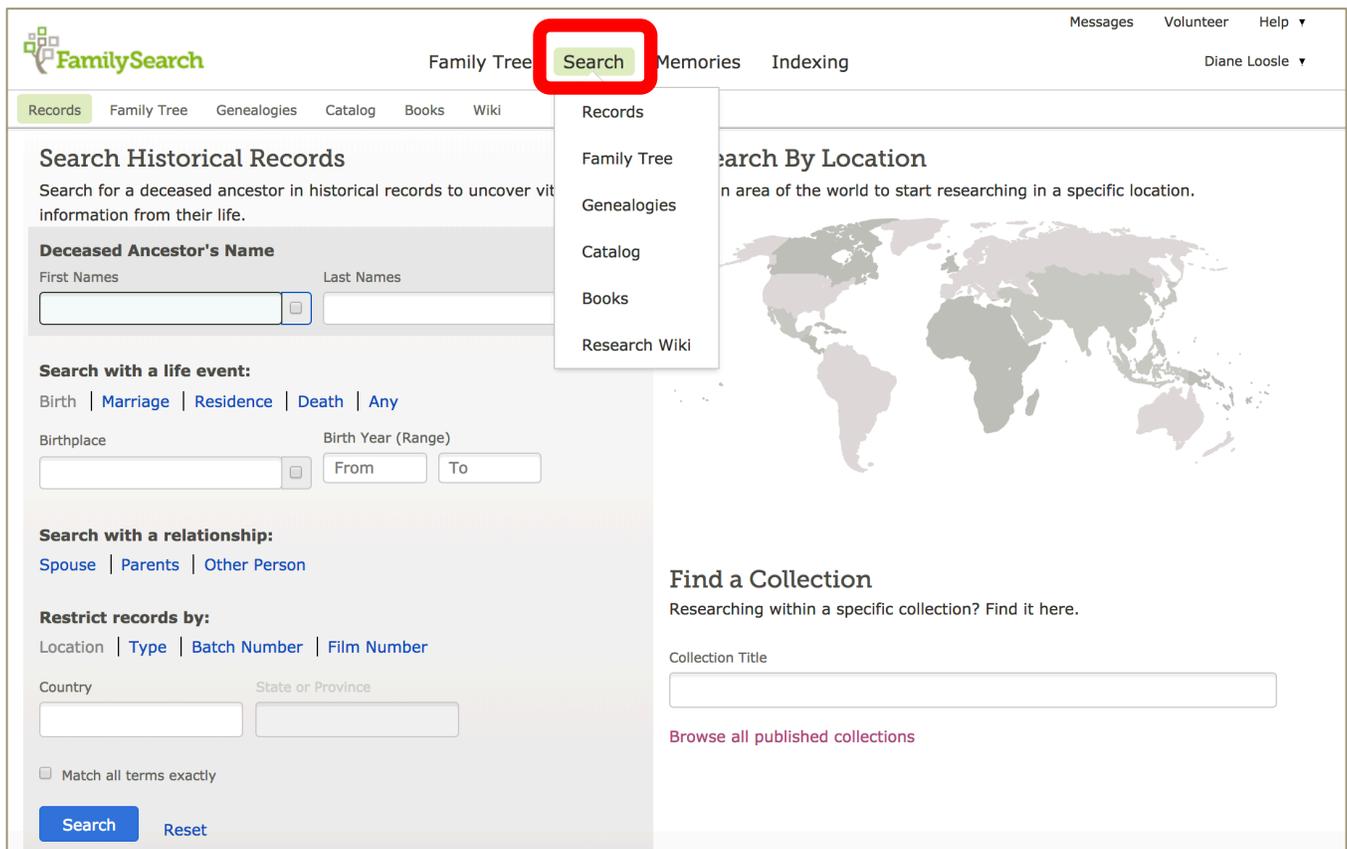
When you are on each person page within the Tree, there is a box on the right-hand side labeled **Search Records**, which contains the icons for FamilySearch, Ancestry, FindMyPast and My Heritage. These are links that will search for that ancestor in these sites using the data from the Tree.

FamilySearch is, of course, free to access so the records may be viewed. The other sites will show you the list of results, but to access the records one must have a subscription or be located in a Family History Center. You can modify the search results by modifying the search parameters that the computer used.



## 3. Search Indexed Records from Search

The **Search** menu on FamilySearch contains several searches, the first of which is searching records.



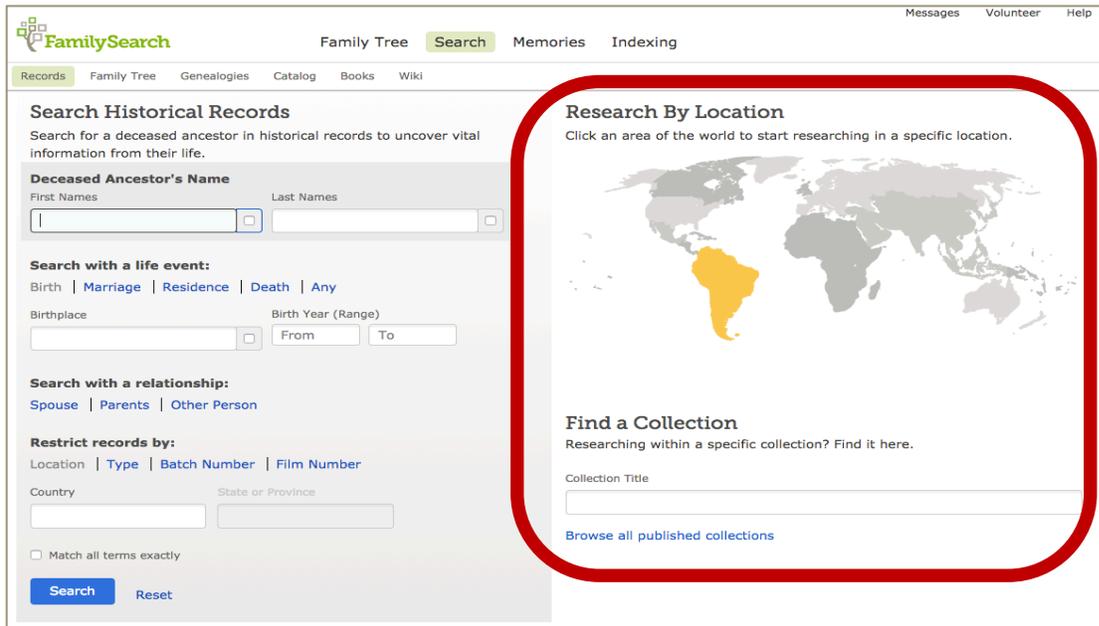
This searches only the indexed records available on FamilySearch which is only about ¼ of the records available on FamilySearch.

Besides doing the basics of searching, FamilySearch's search engine has capabilities that make it one of the most powerful searches for genealogy. Few other search engines allow such easy search parameters and criteria to be set by searchers. The FamilySearch search engine now offers the following important search features:

- Search given-names only, based on a very localized area or narrowed time-frame: This is crucial for effective searches in all patronymic countries, such as in Scandinavia, Iceland, and Wales, and sometimes in southern U.S Research.
- Search just the surname, with a localized town or parish: For marriage searches when the first given name isn't exactly known and in patronymic research.
- Search on just a year of birth and a small place-name only (such as a town, parish, a chapel—for example: 1833 Brierley Hill, Staffordshire, England) without typing in ANY names!
- Search with one wildcard (\*) in just the surname, using a place-name, such as: "Sm\*th" and "St Gregory by St Paul, London."
- Search by using two or more wildcards (\*) in a surname. For example: Th\*b\* or, T\*b\*u\* (for Thibadeau, Theobald, Thibault, etc.) Difficult-to-find variant-spelled surnames now are much less of a problem to locate in the system. Note: The search "results" or "hits" may not yet be alpha-arranged, nor ranked by country.
- Search for "Smyth" ONLY returns "Smyth" or "Smythe" results! No more Smyth mingled with Smith!
- Search using only the father's name or both father and mother's name. Just click on "Advanced Search", and then click "Relationship"—"Parents." Type just the father or name of both parents, with no given name[s] of child at all: For running "Parent" searches to find most/all children born to an ancestor.
- Search to determine any number of illegitimate children born to a person: Search on just the mother's name—her given name and/or maiden surname—and then click "parent" under the Relationship box.
- Search when you don't know or are unsure of the spelling of the prefix or a large portion of the beginning of a surname, no problem—just use the wildcard (\*) in front of the surname and spell the last part of the surname as you know it. For example, as in the surname of Thibou, you could search on just \*bou. Or use to multiple wildcards in a surname such as Czelusniak, you could search on just \*lus\*k. Question-marks ("?") may be used as single-letter wildcard as well, such as for Elizabeth you could search on Eli?abeth.
- You can select to search for exactly what you put into the search box to narrow our results down further. Only use this when necessary because the more exact the search the more you will miss entries. Sometimes there are too many entries to sort through. Exact searching assists in narrowing the search results.

#### 4. Browse UnIndexed Waypointed Records via Collections

There are multiple ways to access the unindexed images available on FamilySearch. Just over half of all the images can be accessed via the **Research by Location** or **Find a Collection > Browse all published collections** sections of the **Search > Records** page.



#### *Using “Waypoints” in Browsable Collection Images*

The unindexed collections which are browsable via the **Research by Location** or **Browse all published collections** sections have been organized into groupings we call “waypoints”. You can think of waypoints like chapter headings in a book or distance markers on a road—they help you navigate to the section of the images that is relevant to you. Waypoints vary depending on what the collection contains and what makes the most sense to organize that collection. Location, time period, names, volumes, record type, etc., are all possible approaches to waypointing. Waypoints make a collection which may contain millions of images, accessible.

Once you use the waypoints to find the right section you can then use the image thumbnails and the next and previous arrows to navigate the images. Or jump into the collection by entering another number into the field for which image you are on.

#### 5. Browse Unindexed and Unwaypointed Records via the FamilySearch Catalog

About one quarter of all the images available on FamilySearch may only be accessed through the FamilySearch Catalog—currently over 1 billion images. These records are those images for which the heavy work that is needed to make them waypointed or indexed has not yet been completed. They include the digital images of the microfilm digitization project, as well as, other records that were captured digitally.

These can be accessed by searching the FamilySearch Catalog for the desired record collection and

once in catalog entry for the collection under the **Format** field an icon will appear like the icons below. If it is a camera icon you may click it to access the digital images.



**Indexed and  
searchable**



**Digital images  
viewable**



**Digital images viewable  
with Restrictions  
(i.e., Family History  
Center only)**



**Microfilm only**

### *Indices created along with the record*

Remember that records can often contain an index within the record itself, normally at the beginning or end of books or years, or an index may have been created in a separate volume but the index volume has also been digitized. Reading the collection descriptions in the browsable collections and the catalog entry in the FamilySearch Catalog will often give you tips about existing indexes.

### 6. Search Genealogies

This section of FamilySearch are trees which have been collected or contributed to FamilySearch. It includes the old Ancestral File and Pedigree Resource File. It also contains information from the Guild of One-Name Studies, trees from groups who have reconstructed whole communities, oral genealogies from the Pacific Island and Africa and other contributed trees from partner organizations. This area of the website is becoming a great resource and is growing.

### 7. Search Books by name (published family histories)

Under the search tab you may search the collection of digitized books. There are over 350,000 books which have been digitized. The collection includes family histories, county and local histories, genealogy magazines and how-to books, gazetteers, and medieval histories and pedigrees. The books have been scanned with OCR (Optical Character Recognition) so that they are every word searchable. Use the advanced search for additional functionality. Some books may only be viewed while in a Family History Center.

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