

FAMILY RECONSTRUCTION: FINDING THE CHILDREN

How to rebuild a family when there is no Bible, no will, and no list of children. Companion to "Rebuilding a Family From the Records."

THE METHOD SLOT · FOLLOW · READ THE WITNESSES

Before 1850, the federal census names only the head of household. Put every known child into the age columns, follow every child to the end of life, and read every witness in every file. Then grade each child by the strength of the evidence.

RECORDS THAT NAME (OR COUNT) CHILDREN

RECORD	WHAT IT CAN TELL YOU	WATCH FOR
1790–1840 census	Head of household plus tally marks by age and sex	Leftover tally marks = unnamed children or other residents
1850–1870 census	Every person by name, age, birthplace	Relationships not stated until 1880
Marriage records	Bride and groom, date, officiant	Consent notes for minors may name a parent
Ohio death certificates	From Dec. 1908: father's name, mother's maiden name, birth date	Informant may be guessing; check who gave the facts
Pension files	Affidavits from relatives and neighbors	Witnesses may be children who never say so
Probate and land	Heirs named in estates and deeds	Search every county the family lived in

Key rule: Do not force every tally mark to fit. A leftover mark is a research lead, not an error.

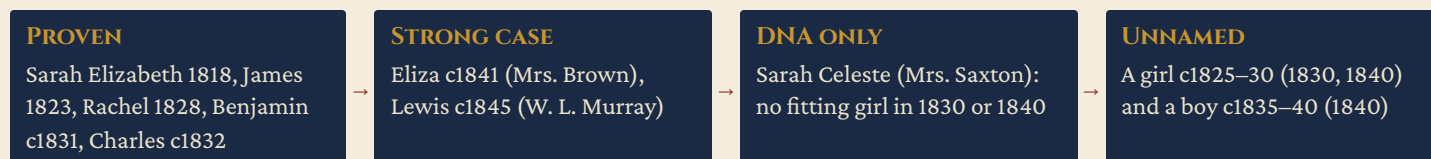
CENSUS SLOTTING WORKSHEET (COPY FOR EACH YEAR)

LINE	FILL IN
Year / place	_____
Males by age	under 5 ___ 5–9 ___ 10–14 ___ 15–19 ___ 20–29 ___ 30–39 ___ 40–49 ___
Females by age	under 5 ___ 5–9 ___ 10–14 ___ 15–19 ___ 20–29 ___ 30–39 ___ 40–49 ___
Known children slotted	_____
Left over	_____

FAMILY RECONSTRUCTION WORKFLOW

- 1 List every child you suspect, with an estimated birth year.
- 2 Slot them into every pre 1850 census; note every leftover mark.
- 3 Find the 1850 household and match names to the earlier tallies.
- 4 Follow each child to death: death certificate, obituary, probate.
- 5 Read every pension, deed, and probate witness; ages and places can reveal children.
- 6 Grade each child: proven by records, strong record case, DNA only, or unidentified.
- 7 Keep DNA only relationships in their own box until a record supports them.

EXAMPLE: WILLIAM MORROW & ELEANOR PIPER



The two 1879 pension witnesses, Eliza J. Brown (36) and W. L. Murray (34), match Eliza (9) and Lewis (5) in the 1850 household. Sarah Elizabeth's 1910 Ohio death certificate names her father, William Murray, and gives a birth date that helps settle her parents' marriage year.

COMMON RESEARCH TRAPS

Forcing the fit: If a child doesn't fit the columns, say so. Don't move the birth year to make it fit.

One record only: A single record naming a parent is strong; two independent ones are better.

Secondhand informants: Death certificates are often filled in decades later by a grandchild.

Spelling: Murray / Morrow, Piper / Pifer: search every form, and standardize in your notes.

DNA alone: DNA shows relationship, not always which relationship. Pair it with records.

Generated visuals: Illustrations explain; they are not evidence.

WHERE TO SEARCH

FamilySearch · Ohio death certificates, 1908 to 1953; county marriages	familysearch.org
Ancestry · U.S. federal censuses, 1790 to 1950	ancestry.com
Ohio History Connection · Death certificate indexes and copies	ohiohistory.org
National Archives · Pension files and ordering	archives.gov

MORE OHIO AND MIGRATION RESEARCH GUIDES: BRICKWALLSBUCKEYES.COM

Keep pushing past your brick walls.