

TRACING WOMEN THROUGH MARRIAGES

How to follow a woman whose surname changed. Companion to “She Married Twice and Her Family Forgot Her First Husband.”

THE METHOD FATHER’S HOUSE · MARRIAGES · HUSBANDS’ HOMES · DEATH · CHILDREN

A woman could change her surname every time she married. Search under one name and she disappears. Find her in five places, then test what you found against what her children said about her.

RECORDS THAT FOLLOW A WOMAN

RECORD	WHAT IT CAN TELL YOU	WATCH FOR
1790–1840 census	A girl of the right age in her father’s house; later, a wife’s age column in her husband’s	Tally marks only; no names
Marriage records	Her name at each marriage; a widow is often listed as “Mrs.” or by her earlier married name	Brides under 18 needed consent; check margins and loose papers for a parent’s name
1850–1880 census	Children with a different surname in her new household point to an earlier marriage	Relationships not stated until 1880
1900 & 1910 census	Children born and living; years married; birth month and year (1900)	“Years married” may count only the current marriage
Ohio death certificates	Hers: father and mother. Her children’s: their mother’s maiden name	Informants may give a married name in the maiden-name slot
Obituaries	Surviving children, married daughters’ names, family stories	First marriages and dead children are often left out
Probate & guardianship	Guardians for a first husband’s minor children; estates naming the widow	Search the county where the first husband died

Key rule: When a widow remarries, look for her first husband’s children in her new husband’s home.

HER SURNAME TIMELINE

STEP	FILL IN
Birth name & date	_____
Father’s household	Census year / place: _____
Marriage 1	Date / county / husband: _____
Children, marriage 1	_____
How marriage 1 ended	Death / divorce, date, source: _____
Marriage 2	Date / county / husband: _____
Children, marriage 2	_____
Bridge record	Record that shows both families together: _____
Death	Date / place / name on certificate: _____

THE FIVE-PLACE CHECKLIST

- ☐ 1 In her father’s house: a daughter of the right age in the census before her first marriage.
- ☐ 2 At every marriage: each marriage record, with any consent note or loose papers.
- ☐ 3 In every husband’s house: each census, watching for children with a different surname.
- ☐ 4 At her death: death certificate, obituary, burial, and who the informant was.
- ☐ 5 Through her children: their death certificates and what each gives as her maiden name.

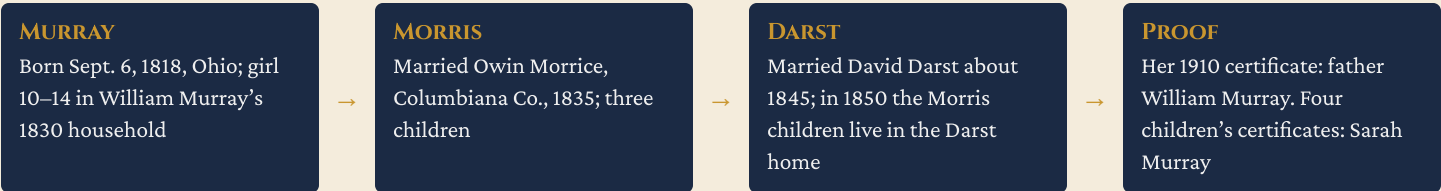
WHEN THE DATES DISAGREE

SOURCE	DATE IT GIVES	CHECK AGAINST THE CHILDREN	FITS?

HER CHILDREN’S DEATH CERTIFICATES

CHILD	DIED	INFORMANT	MOTHER’S MAIDEN NAME GIVEN	NOTES

EXAMPLE: SARAH ELIZABETH MURRAY (1818–1910)



COMMON TRAPS

Married name as maiden name: informants often write a first married name in the maiden-name slot.

Obituaries compress a life: “married in 1840” may skip a first husband entirely.

Years married: the 1900 and 1910 census count may cover only the current marriage.

Wandering birthplaces: compare every census; a woman who could not read could not check the entry.

Same household, same memory: two informants from one home are not two independent sources.

WHERE TO SEARCH

FamilySearch · Ohio county marriages; Ohio death certificates, 1908–1953	familysearch.org
Ancestry · U.S. federal censuses, 1790–1950	ancestry.com
Newspapers · Obituaries and marriage notices	newspapers.com · chroniclingamerica.loc.gov
County probate courts · Marriage papers, guardianships, estates	ohiohistory.org

MORE OHIO RESEARCH GUIDES: BRICKWALLSBUCKEYES.COM

Keep pushing past your brick walls.