

## **Mehitable Higginbotham, County Clerk of Podunk County**

Now, I aint't gonna talk to you about on-the-spot research in courthouses. I want to **SPEECHIFY** about writing to courthouses for some kind of information.

I wonder if they's any of you out there **HAS WROTE** to a courthouse? If they is, wouldja raise your hand? My! I done come to the right place!

**FIRST THING** – right off – you better know that courthouses ain't got no **RESEARCH PERSON**. Now, if they have the time, they don't mind tending to your needs, but for goodness sakes, do remember the **ALPHABETS** of letter writing to courthouses.

Let's take the C's:

Be **CONCISE**. State your needs in as few words as possible. But be **COMPLETE**. Give all them pertinent facts. Git it to point:

### **WHO, WHAT, WHEN, & WHERE.**

**WHO** – Give the full name. In case of female type records - give the maiden and married name if possible. Give the **RIGHT** names. **NICKNAMES** ain't gonna cut the mustard.

**WHAT?** What is it that you Want?

**BIRTH CERTIFICATE?** Now, don't forget that births wadn't registered until the early 1900s. Ain't gonna do no good to write for a birth certificate before around 1914 cause they ain't none. Unless you're lucky enough to find a **DELAYED BIRTH CERTIFICATE**, and that had most likely to do with money – like Social Security, or such such.

**DEATH CERTIFICATE ?** If'n you are taking notes, just ditto what I done said about birth certificates.

**WILLS ?** Now more often as not, wills was done made when the Will – or done thought he was on is death bed, or about to be. Now, I don't tell everbody this, but I'm gonna tell you. If you really want good information, ask for a **probate record** or Packet, or an **estate settlement** record. If'n there's a will, it will be included in that and you'll get more stuff. There again – be sue to specify time of death or at least about the time.

Now, them **probate** or **settlement of estate** records is in various forms. They's some that jest tell you everthin because it shows how the estate was done disbursed among them heirs. And they's some that had to be dealt with in this manner because the male or estate-owner didn't leave no will.

Mores the pity, didn't very many female type people make wills. Them wills you need to establish family relationships was made before the days of **E. R. A.**

**MARRIAGE RECORD?** Sometimes you might get lucky. They – they wedding couple – just might have taken out a **license**. And if the minister took the time to return the license and register the marriage – you got it made. Don't forget sometimes you ancestors got married by **banns** – that's another story. Anyway, the courthouses ain't got no record of that. They did post **bonds**. Them that could find somebody to assure the power that be that they was A.Okay – and most often as not, it was a family member.

And don't forget too. That sometimes they wasn't a preacher to marry them – so they done lived as man and wife until a preacher came along, so if'n you find a marriage record that is dated sometimes after the first two or three kids was borned, don't think too hard on them. They was married in the sight of the Lord!

**LAND RECORDS?** Lawsy, you know that some of them people, especially them pioneers, done moved onto a piece of land, cleared it, lived on it and then when it was done surveyed to be sold, they done moved on if'n they couldn't afford to buy it. Now, we got letters all the time saying that they knowed their ancestors lived in a certain spot for 13 ½ years and we'd better come across with some kind of a deed. Well, if'n you get a letter back from the court house saying they ain't no such deed – don't forget to consider what I just said. And sometime them people bought and sold land like it was going outta style, so do try to be precise when writing for a deed. Now, some things you need to know about Deeds is:

That is several ways that court houses all over label their land records and books:

1. One is the **GRANTOR – GRANTEE**. The GRANTEE is the **GETTE**.
2. Conveyance Records.
3. **DIRECT – INDIRECT**. The direct indexes are indexed by the name of the buyer – the indirect by the name of the seller.

You can usually tell when yore ancestor done come into a community. If you will check the index of the land records (whatever they are called in your area of research) most probably the time period that the **first land** was bought may very well indicate when your feller done come to that part of the country – and the **last entry** might indicate when he left or when he died.

Did you know that in most cases when a person bought his first piece of landing a new county or state that the deed sometimes **named the place** that he done come from?

Now they was at least two ways land was acquired by anybody. They **bot** it, or the **inherited it**. Sometimes if'n they had done fought in some find of war, they was given land for their service. Ifn't they inherited it – you might find a deed that names a whole bunch of people – all related. This is usually indicated in the index as “**et al.**” Cause when the land was sold to settle the estate – all the heirs had to sign the papers.

Now, when you write for a deed, if you know the Book & Page number and perhaps number of acres, it might get better results from the overworked county clerks. Why, I've even known researchers to write for a copy of an index that would include a specific surname and a specific time period, so when they write for a deed, they can give a book and page number.

**CIVIL RECORDS?** Now, that's where your ancestor done sued his neighbor for killing his pig – and then not giving him none. Most likely them records ain't indexed. It's hard to write for a civil record. They's usually found in the Minute Books, and you just have to go to the court house and read them for yourself.

**CRIMINAL RECORDS?** I don't have to explain that – cause ain't **nobody** I ever knew had any criminal ancestors.

**WHEN** Give the exact date if possible for the document you are looking for. Ifn'n you don't know the exact date – gesstimate it as near as possible. Don't be sending any of the “sometime in the 1800's” stuff.

**WHERE** – Do be sure it is that you are writing to the right court house. Don't do no good to send them queries to Paducah County ifn them poples was where in Pokonoh.

**WHY** - They don't care why. They could't care less.

Don't forget them **SASSYS** – you know, that's them self-addressed-stamped envelopes. You ain't gonna get no kind of answer without one of them.

**MONEY** – A \$2.00 check used to cover about ansything you wanted copies of, but no-adays, what with inflation and the beaurocracy, it might be wise to just write and ask they got the record and how much it would cost you to get a copy of the documents before you send your hard-earned money.

Now that I done tole you about what some of the records are that you can write to courthouses for, I want to share something else with you. Thru the years I made a collection of rather interesting letters, so I brought some of these letters and abstracts from letter I done got. These might show you now **NOT** to write to court houses.