

Silent Voices: Telling the Stories of Your Female Ancestors

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While most historical records have been created for and/or about men, making it more challenging to research and write about female ancestors. This session will demonstrate effective ways to discover your female ancestors and how to document their lives in a meaningful way.

Researching Female Ancestors: Why So Difficult?

- Prior to the 20th century, it is typically difficult to locate and trace women
- Most historical records have been created for and are about men
- Property was usually listed under the man's name
- Men ran the majority of the businesses and controlled the government
- The man's surname was carried to the next generation by the children
- Few women left diaries or letters
- Cultural influences toward the behavior and treatment of women

Five Strategies for Finding Female Ancestors

1. Check all records for her husband, especially tax, property, and naturalization records. Also, check records for siblings. Look for clues in photographs, newspapers, yearbooks, bridal books, employment, convent, military, books, monographs, printed sources, and other records).
2. Consider the possibility of more than one marriage and multiple burial markers.
3. Learn naming practices and patterns and note regional, cultural, and religious influences. For example, Elizabeth (English) vs. Alzbeta (Czech & Slovak) vs. Erzébet (Hungarian). Investigate different endings for female surnames (e.g. in for Slovaks, add an -ova, to a woman's name when searching databases or European records).
4. Be aware of spelling variations, and handwriting/transcription errors when searching census, immigration or vital records.
5. Create a timeline to place the woman's life in historical context.

Breaking the Silence

- Record stories of living female ancestors/write your own story
- Encourage more women to research/write about family history
- Honor female ancestors

Telling the Stories

- Write a character sketch about a female ancestor
- Use photographs, documents, or interviews to enhance the story
- Create a video – use a tool such as Animoto (free trial available)
<https://www.lisaalzo.com/animoto>
- Blog about your female ancestors, using the “Fearless Females” Blogging prompts: <http://bit.ly/2EO05Qp>

Conclusion

While tracing female ancestors can be difficult and challenging, it is not impossible. With a bit of creativity and patience you can trace your maternal ancestry. We all need to explore the histories of our female ancestors, and then document our findings for future generations—to give voice to the stories of the silent women from our past.

Immigration Stories

- Ellis Island
<https://www.libertyellisfoundation.org>
- StoryCorps
<https://www.storycorps.org>

For Further Reading and Learning

"Any woman who is now or may hereafter be married . . ." Women and Naturalization, ca. 1802-1940 by Marian L. Smith, Summer 1998, Vol. 30, No. 2

<https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/1998/summer/women-and-naturalization-1.html>

Books and Guides

- Legacy Family Tree QuickGuide™: *Finding Your Female Ancestors*, Lisa A. Alzo
<https://www.lisaalzo.com/femaleancestorspdf>
- *Fearless Females: 31 Writing Prompts to Celebrate Women’s History* by Lisa A. Alzo
<https://www.lisaalzo.com/fearlessfemales-ebook>
- *Three Slovak Women* by Lisa A. Alzo. CreateSpace
<https://www.lisaalzo.com/tsw>

Articles by Lisa A. Alzo

- "Finding Your Femme Fatales," by Lisa A. Alzo, *Internet Genealogy*, Special Issue Tracing Your Ancestors Series, Tracing Your Female Ancestors, Volume 2, 2015.
- "15 Fantastic Sites for Tracing Female Ancestors" by Lisa A. Alzo, *Internet Genealogy*, Oct./Nov. 2010
- "Ladies First" by Lisa A. Alzo, *Family Tree Magazine*, Jan. 2008
- "There's Something about Mary" by Lisa A. Alzo, *Internet Genealogy*, Jan. 2008
- "20th Century Desperate Housewives" by Lisa A. Alzo, *Family Chronicle*, Oct.2006

Courses

- **Finding Your Female Ancestors Course and The Write Stuff Courses:**
Research, Write, Connect.
<https://www.researchwriteconnect.com>
- **Research: Grandmothers, Mothers & Daughters-Tracing Women**
National Institute for Genealogical Studies
<https://www.genealogicalstudies.com>

Websites

- **FamilySearch**
<https://familysearch.org>
- **Google Books**
<https://books.google.com>
- **Library of Congress American Memory Project**
<https://www.loc.gov/collections>
- **National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections**
<http://www.loc.gov/coll/nucmc>
- **One-Step Webpages by Stephen P. Morse**
<https://stevemorse.org>

Newspapers

- **Chronicling America**
<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>
- **Fulton History**
<https://fultonhistory.com>
- **GenealogyBank**
<https://www.genealogybank.com>
- **Newspapers.com (Ancestry)**
<https://www.newspapers.com>
- **Newspaper Archive**
<https://newspaperarchive.com>
- **Newspapers.com**
<https://www.newspapers.com>
- **Google News Archive**
<https://news.google.com/newspapers>
- **Online Historical Newspapers Site**
<https://sites.google.com/site/onlinenewspapersite>
- **The Ancestor Hunt**
<http://www.theancestorhunt.com/newspapers.html>

Timelines

- **Airtable**
<https://www.lisaalzo.com/airtable>
- **Genelines (\$)**
<https://progenygenealogy.com>
- **OurTimelines**
<http://www.ourtimelines.com>
- **TimeToast**
<https://www.timetoast.com>
- **Twile**
<https://twile.com>