

Turning Genealogy Clues into Genealogy To Do's

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Losing Track of New Clues

Picture this genealogy research scenario: you are reviewing a new document for an ancestor on [FamilySearch](#) to prove a birth date or a birth location for that person. During the review, you notice new information that a) is related to the ancestor being researched and/or b) is related to other ancestors or even c) new ancestors! Right now, how do you “capture” that information so that you can take advantage of it later AND you don’t derail your current research goal? In order to get the most out of your genealogy research process, you may need to create a method of managing new data.

Ignoring BSOs (“Bright and Shiny Objects”)

The term BSO is shorthand for “Bright and Shiny Object” and can be anything from a shaky leaf on a genealogy website, to a newly found record, to a box of photos sent to you from a relative. If not handled properly, a BSO can cause your research to be derailed while you lose focus on your original research goal. Genealogy is a minefield of BSOs, many of which can be avoided while others require action within a specific time frame. Here’s how I handle BSOs in my genealogy research and why I believe conquering the BSO syndrome is the key to research success.

Finding new leads is one of the keys to keeping us interested in our genealogy research. It makes sense, doesn’t it? Genealogy sites like Ancestry and FamilySearch have capitalized on the excitement we get when there is the potential of finding a new ancestor. That is why we use Ancestor Hints or Smart Matches and sign up for alerts.

A new lead could come about from evaluating a record. A recent example: the World War I draft card for my great-grandfather John Ralph AUSTIN in 1917 lists that he had a wife and child. This was my first evidence of such information and my instinct was to stop everything and find out more. There’s a better way to handle these new leads:

- Create a To-Do List (see below) and record each proof element to be researched based on the new information. **Do this immediately** so you don’t forget.
- For the example above, one proof point entered would be “***Determine name of wife of John Ralph AUSTIN***” and another would be “***Determine marriage date of AUSTIN John Ralph and UNKNOWN Wife of John Ralph AUSTIN.***”
- Enter the date you discovered the information and in the notes briefly mention how you came about the information: “***Based on World War I draft card for John Ralph AUSTIN reviewed on 28 October 2018.***”

Make it a habit to “capture” new leads each and every time. Not only will you begin building a list of research items, but you’ll resist the temptation to follow that BSO!

Genealogy To Do Lists to the Rescue

A good To Do List is your first line of defense against BSOs and the best way to capture important information that requires action at a later time. I highly recommend the use of a To-Do List to track each “proof point” you are researching. A proof point is the fact you are trying to prove such as the birth date of an ancestor: ***Prove the birth date of John Ralph AUSTIN***. A good To-Do List system helps you track various proof points, which records to use when researching, the date you started tracking a proof point and more.

Several apps and programs are suitable to use for a To Do List:

- Use paper or a notebook
- Maintain a list for each ancestor in **Microsoft Word**
- Create a list in **Microsoft Excel** or, better yet, include as a spreadsheet tab in your Genealogy Research Log in Excel
- Use a free program such as **Evernote** or **Trello**.

Case Study: Gathering New Clues from a World War I United States Draft Registration Card

Click [HERE](https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-81XS-9215?i=233&cc=1968530) (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-81XS-9215?i=233&cc=1968530>) to access the World War I United States Draft Registration Card for John Ralph AUSTIN on FamilySearch.

Your only knowledge is that John Ralph AUSTIN was supposedly born on 31 January 1896 in Lowville, New York (according to a family story). While working to prove this information, what new clues about the life of John Ralph AUSTIN do you discover on the WWI Draft Card? How would you break down the new information into proof points that can be tracked? How would you enter the information in your To Do List?

Case Study: Gathering New Clues from a 1920 United States Federal Census Population Sheet

Click [HERE](https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GR6T-W5K?cc=1488411) (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GR6T-W5K?cc=1488411>) to access the 1920 United States Federal Census population schedule for John Ralph AUSTIN on FamilySearch.

Your research knowledge at this point is that John Ralph AUSTIN was, in fact, born on 31 January 1896 in Lowville, New York. You have also been told through a relative that his wife’s name was Therese McGINNES. While working to prove the marriage date and location of John Ralph AUSTIN and Therese McGINNES you notice an entry in the 1920 census that may or may not be in line with your ancestor’s information.

How would you break down the new information into proof points that can be tracked? How would you enter the information in your To Do List? What else should be done with this record on the FamilySearch site?

Tips and Tricks for Efficient Clue Gathering

- **Capture everything and save for later.** This means using apps like **Trello** or **Evernote** to “clip and save” articles, links to new databases and even digitized documents and photos for closer inspection when time permits. Or create your own “capture” protocol to save content and note when and where found!
- **Create to-do lists.** When I start researching a branch of my family, I always have a To Do List document open for noting those nagging “*I have to remember to do THIS*” thoughts. Example: As I research my great-grandfather John Ralph AUSTIN, I determine that his birth date means he would have been the right age for being drafted during World War I. My To Do List entry: “**Locate World War I draft registration for John Ralph AUSTIN.**”
- **Consider using a research log.** If you are using a research log only because other researchers are doing so, then you’re wasting your time. Understand the benefits of tracking your research journey.
- **Have research tools organized and ready to use.** Why spend 30 minutes searching for a specific site where you found genealogy records last week when you could better use that time researching an ancestor? Consider building a **Genealogy Research Toolbox** (<https://genealogytoolbox.weebly.com/>) which is a list of most used resources and websites. This “toolbox” can take many forms: an Excel spreadsheet, web browser favorites, a Word document, etc.
- **Decrease the amount of time looking for files and folders.** Accurately label all your files, especially when an automated process such as scanning an image creates its own file name. Determine a naming convention that works for you and STICK WITH IT – consistency is the key! Example: the World War I US Draft Card for John Ralph AUSTIN dated June 5, 1917 would be named **AUSTIN John Ralph b1896 WWI Draft Card 19170605.**

Resource List

- **FamilySearch**
<https://familysearch.org>
 - **Evernote**
<https://evernote.com>
 - **Genealogy Research Log**
<https://genealogyresearchlog.com>
 - ***The Genealogy Do-Over: Slow Down, You Move Too Fast!***
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- ***The Genealogy Do-Over: The Value of a BSO***
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- **Trello**
<https://trello.com>