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TRACKING AN ANCESTOR BACK TO NORTH CAROLINA

A search for the parents of an ancestor who was born in North Carolina but died elsewhere depends on when he or she left this state. If the ancestor was a minor, a married woman, or a slave, you first must identify the free adult male (father, guardian, husband, or owner) in that person's life. If the ancestor was born here before 1913, there is no birth certificate to identify parents.

Begin your search for the parents in the place where you found the ancestor, not the place where the person was born. Work systematically backwards through the person's life from death to birth, starting with the will or records of the individual's *own estate*. Examine the inventories or accounts of sales for clues to occupation, social/economic status, ethnicity, and religion. Identify children, administrators or executors, bondsmen, and estate sale purchasers (they may be relatives, friends, and neighbors who moved there with the ancestor).

Search the deeds for a land division among heirs, for acquisition of that land, and for the earliest deed (its date may approximate a person's arrival in the county or age of majority; other information in it may give place of origin). Also examine marriage, tax, and court documents.

Record complete data for the ancestor's census "family" from every census in which the person was a head-of-household in that state (remember—the person was ten years younger on each earlier census). Collect census data for about ten neighbors on each side of the family and for anyone of the same surname or anyone mentioned in probate and other documents. Study these individuals' records for clues about relationships among them as well as their arrival dates and origins. Examine county histories and maps for likely migration routes and origins of prominent settlers.

Assemble all the data in chronological order, **noting all sources**, to use in the next stages of your search.

Without vital records, **proof of an ancestor's parentage will most likely be found in the place where the parents died, not where the child was born.** Backtrack the ancestor's migration each step of the way. When the person ceases to appear as a census head-of-household, note also the presence/absence of his neighbors and associates. Search *for the group's* earlier appearances along migration routes.

Wherever the ancestor was when he would have been a child in the next-earlier census, look there for householders of the same surname with a child of the right sex and age. Search that householder's records. As before, begin with probate documents, deeds, and other county records. If the household did not die in that place, retrace the migration route to look for the place where that person died.

Any record you find that proves who a person's children were, also proves who was the parent of each of those children. If your ancestor was one of the children, you have found this father or mother. If not, continue your search as before. When you have found the ancestor's parent, continue tracking that parent backwards step-by-step repeating the same strategies.

You will also want to consult the excellent article and bibliography "People Finders for North Carolina," by Jeffrey L. Haines in *The North Carolina Genealogical Society Journal* 35 (February 2009): 5-14.

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