



10 THINGS TO KNOW: BLACK SHEEP

Looking for the shady characters in your own family tree? Whether they were bootleggers or brothel owners, black sheep are some of the most interesting ancestors you'll ever trace. Our 10 Things to Know will help you figure out where to turn to herd your own family's black sheep.



1 Who's the black sheep in your family?

He or she is the one who went against the grain—negatively. Of course it's all a matter of perception, but you may discover that you're looking at a black sheep simply by looking at comments in the census and elsewhere. Try a few of these on for size.

| | | | | |
|---------------------------|----------|--|---|---------------|
| Rushton, Georgia Ann w 34 | | | 1 | Washing |
| — Florence w 11 | Daughter | | 1 | Keeping house |
| — Harry w 7 5 | Son | | | |
| — Charles w 11 3 | Son | | 1 | |
| Rushton, Thomas w 12 34 | Husband | | 1 | Drunkard |

No. 1111 (Christian name) She Devil! | 1 | Says "we must keep away or get shot" w

REMARKS: Saw 11 - Frank Snow - was a woman of ill fame.

2 Black sheep often have long paper trails.

| | |
|---|--|
| Exchanged 11/1/1919 Exp. 11/1/1919 Lawrence NOV 1 1 1919 11/8/19 Lawrence of Paul Office | |
| Released Jan. 6, 1920 Released on Parole May 14, 1921 NOV 1 1 1919 11/8/19 Lawrence of Paul Office | |
| William S. [unclear] NOV 1 1 1919 9/1/19 [unclear] | |

Depending on your ancestor's offense, you may find his or her trail in newspaper records, court records, and even prison records. If committing crimes—and getting caught and tried—was your black sheep's forte, check newspapers more carefully. Coverage of a criminal trial may have lasted months and extended well beyond the town or county where it

was committed. Even petty criminals could make repeat appearances in the town's published police blotter.

3 Family stories are comfortable homes for black sheep ancestors.

But before you add Jesse James to your family tree, check out the story carefully. Passed-down stories are notorious for their on-the-fly edits, which in turn get handed to the next generation and beyond. To sort truth from fiction, create a timeline of the story and mesh it with known records. Jot down ages, years and family relationships from census and birth, marriage and death records. Check city directories for whereabouts during the 10 years between censuses. Search yearbooks and the Defective, Dependent and Delinquent census schedule for details about childhoods (see #9 for more). And check the attic for clues lurking in albums and scrapbooks.

4 What's in a black sheep's name?

Whether your black sheep ancestor was escaping the law, a jilted lover or something else entirely, he or she may have adopted a new name. If you think that's the case with your ancestor, try the following:

- Search by criteria.** Forget names and use birthplace, age, gender, occupation and other details that match your ancestor. Pay attention to names that sound familiar: a family member's maiden name or middle name, for example.

- b. **Lengthen and shorten names.** The alias might be taken from the existing surname.
- c. **Follow the black sheep's address in city directories.** The name may have changed even when the address remained the same.

5 Other people may have written about your black sheep ancestor in their own histories.

Check written local histories and biographies of law-enforcement officers: either may mention local notorious characters.

6 Certain geographic locations attracted black sheep.

The American West was big—and wild. Check state and territory censuses and newspapers carefully if you think your ancestor migrated, even temporarily. Black sheep in the UK? If he or she was of the criminal variety, check Australian records, too.

7 Black sheep on the lam.

More than just a pun, it's a fact: black sheep had reason to travel the globe or get away from something (see #4). Look for them in passports (bonus: you often get a photo, too), on passenger lists and in out-of-town newspapers. You'll even find a handful of histories about "privateers" and "pirates" in the Ancestry.com card catalog.

8 Everyone has a mother—even black sheep.

Follow the family of a black sheep ancestor in census records and newspapers. You may find mentions of him or her visiting kin, living with a parent, child, sibling or even next door. Pay careful attention to boarders and neighbors who seem to match the black sheep's description.

9 Even the government tracked black sheep.

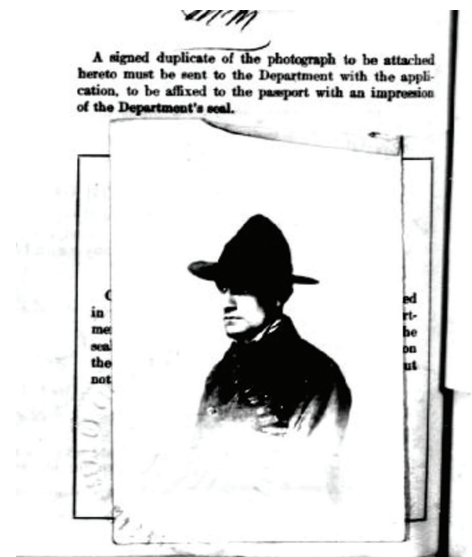
A special census schedule taken in 1880, the Defective, Dependent and Delinquent schedule, included details about people who were imprisoned. While most people included in this special schedule weren't black sheep, it's still worth taking a look: details included are particularly rich. Also remember that prisons and asylums were enumerated in state and federal censuses.



NELSON H. DESSLER

The Canadian "Raffles" who murdered Captain Hasset, and who died 48 hours later from wounds received during the fight with the officer.

Police Biographies



Passports

| Number of Pages | Number of Files | Brooks Co. Jail | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------|-------|
| 48 | 12 | William Sneyd | Medicine | Green |
| 18 | 12 | Dennis Henry | Prison | Green |
| 18 | 12 | George Robert | Prison | Green |
| 18 | 12 | John Allen | Prison | Green |
| 18 | 12 | William Edward | Prison | Green |
| 18 | 12 | William Allen | Prison | Green |
| 18 | 12 | Blacksmith | Prison | Green |

Defective, Dependent and Delinquent

10

Other members of the family may not want to talk about the black sheep.

When you're up against a tightly held family story, dive into the following black-sheep-only collections at Ancestry.com to see if you can learn more:

U.S.

New York, Executive Orders for Commutations, Pardons, Restorations and Respites, 1845-1931

California, Prison and Correctional Records, 1851-1950

New York, Governor's Registers of Commitments to Prisons, 1842-1908

New York, Prisoners Received at Newgate State Prison, 1797-1810

New York, Discharges of Convicts, 1882-1915

Alcatraz, California, U.S. Penitentiary, Prisoner Index, 1934-1963

McNeil Island, Washington, U.S. Penitentiary,

Records of Prisoners Received, 1887-1939

Leavenworth, Kansas, U.S. Penitentiary, Name Index to Inmate

Case Files, 1895-1931

Atlanta, Georgia, U.S. Penitentiary, Prisoner Index, ca. 1880-1922

Ft. Smith Criminal Case Files



Birmingham Black List

UK

London, England, Marshalsea Prison Commitment and Discharge Books, 1811-1842

London, England, King's Bench and Fleet Prison Discharge Books, 1734-1862

Dorset, England, Dorchester Prison Admission and Discharge Registers, 1782-1901

England & Wales, Criminal Registers, 1791-1892

Birmingham, Warwickshire, England, Pub Blacklist, 1903-1906

UK, Prison Hulk Registers and Letter Books, 1802-1849

UK, Licences of Parole for Female Convicts, 1853-1871, 1883-1887

Australia

New South Wales, Australia, Gaol Description and Entrance Books, 1818-1930

New South Wales and Tasmania, Australia Convict Musters, 1806-1849

Australian Convict Transportation Registers - Other Fleets & Ships, 1791-1868

New South Wales, Australia, Registers of Convicts' Applications to Marry, 1826-1851

New South Wales and Tasmania, Australia, Convict Pardons, 1834-1859

Australia, List of Convicts with Particulars, 1788-1842

Australian Convict Index, 1788-1868

New South Wales, Australia Convict Ship Muster Rolls and Related Records, 1790-1849

New South Wales, Australia, Convict Death Register, 1826-1879

Australia - Convict Savings Bank Books, 1824-1886

New South Wales, Australia, Settler and Convict Lists, 1787-1834

New South Wales, Australia, Convict Registers of Conditional and Absolute Pardons 1791-1867

Australian Convict Transportation Registers - First Fleet, 1787-1788

Australian Convict Transportation Registers - Second Fleet, 1789-1790

Australian Convict Transportation Registers - Third Fleet, 1791