

# Using Witnesses to Find Your Ancestors

By Naomi D. Newbold, B.A., A.G. ®

At one point or other, we all hit a brick wall in our research. There are many different strategies used to overcome these brick walls. Witness research is one of those strategies used when faced with a brick wall in your Danish research.

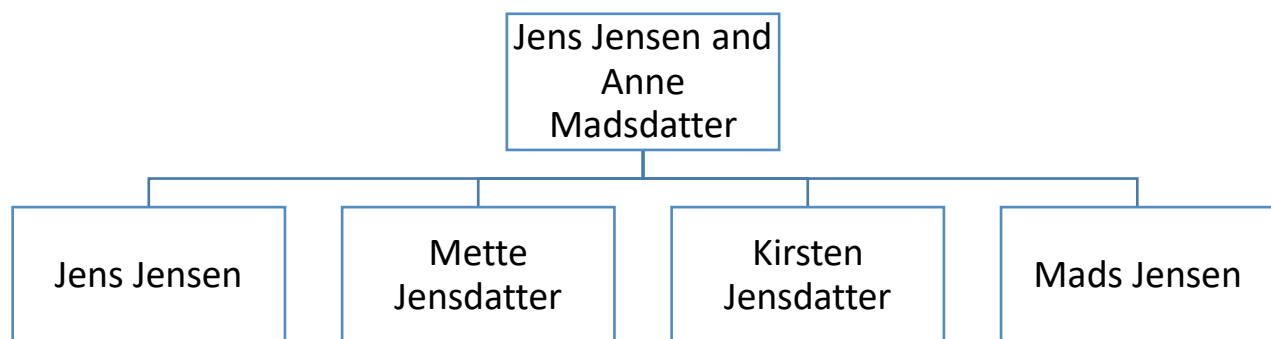
## What is a Witness?

In Danish research, there are witnesses to baptisms and witnesses to marriages. Baptismal witnesses had the great responsibility to make sure a child was raised in the Christian faith, especially if something unfortunate happened to the parents. There are typically three to five witnesses for a christening. These witnesses were customarily immediate and extended family members, close friends of the family, and well-to-do close acquaintances.

There are usually two witnesses at a marriage, and these witnesses are usually family or very good friends of the couple.

## The Research Strategy

So how does this research strategy work? The best way to teach this strategy is through an example. Let us say that we have a couple from Feldgård, Tistrup parish, and their four children:



In our research, we have found the birth records of all four children and the marriage record of the couple. No information can be found on the couple before their marriage, and thus we have a brick wall. To solve this problem we will use witness research strategy.

1. Gather the records and Extract the witnesses.

- To begin, we gather the birth records of each of Jens Jensen and Anne Madsdatter's children, and their marriage record. The following table is an extraction of each of the witnesses:

Year	Witness name	Where From
1759	Jens Jepsen	Uhre
	Anders Christoffersen	Tistrup
	Jørgen Jensen	Feldgård
	Mette Marie Iversdatter	Tistrup
	Anne Marie Knudsdatter	Tistrup
1761	Poul Kristensen's wife	Tistrup
	Søren Sørensen	Krarup
	Jørgen Jensen	Uhre
	Jørgen Jensen's wife	Uhre
	Sophie Magdalene Blad	Fruergård
1762	Karl Ludvig Olsen's wife	Uhre
	Terkel Madsen	Tistrup
	Peder Jensen	Krarup
	Jørgen Jensen	Uhre
	Poul Kristensen's wife	Tistrup
1764	Mads Iversen	Tistrup
	Poul Kristensen	Tistrup
	Terkel Madsen	Tistrup
	Jørgen Jensen	Uhre
	Jørgen Jensen's wife	Uhre

2. Analyze the witnesses.

- The next step is to analyze the names and information of each witness and determine if any of them are possible relatives. Make special note of similar surnames to mom and dad, anyone from the same place, and remember that sisters of the parents may be listed as 'so and so's wife' rather than by her own name.
- By analyzing the witnesses above, there are a few witnesses that may be relatives, but one in particular stands out. Jørgen Jensen not only has the same surname as the father, Jens Jensen, but he shows up as a witness in every baptism and, in the first record, he comes from Feldgård, the same place that Jens Jensen and Anne Madsdatter are from. These facts alone make him a strong candidate to be a relative.

3. Research the witness.

- The final step in witness research is to research the possible relatives found among the witnesses. Use proper research strategy to complete this step.
- If we research Jørgen Jensen, we find that he is the younger brother of Jens Jensen and research can continue on Jens Jensen and his ancestral lines.

