

Genealogy for Beginners

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Capital Area Genealogical Society
June, 2003

WHERE TO BEGIN...

1. Organization is very important. Begin recording your information onto a Pedigree Chart, undocumented or questionable information in pencil. The Family Group Sheet will help keep track of family groups. Take the information that you receive on each ancestor and create a Family Group Sheet on each couple on your Ancestor Chart.
2. Start with yourself, then your parents and their children, your grandparents and their children, etc. As you go back further in time, you should contact relatives or other researchers. Remember you are ONE and you had 2 parents and 4 grandparents, 8 great-grandparents, 16 g-g-grandparents, etc.
3. Use other forms to help you organize your research. Besides using the Pedigree Chart and Family Group Sheets for recording your information, there are also two other forms. These are the Research Calendar and Correspondence Logs. The Research Calendar keeps track of all the research you have completed on each family. The Correspondence Logs help you keep track of when you wrote a letter, what information you requested, the date you received the response, and the results of that correspondence.
4. Obtain information by asking relatives for names, events, dates, places, occupations, religious affiliations, port of entry (immigrants) and ask about family Bibles. When writing to relatives, always include a self-addressed, stamped envelope, which is a common genealogy courtesy...in addition, it encourages responses.
5. Whenever you obtain a copy of a document, a copy of a census record, photocopies of pages from a book or microfilm, EVERYTHING, you should record on the back or appropriate place exactly where the copy came from, including the date received.

It is possible that at some point you may get conflicting information, and by having all of your sources cited, you will better understand where the confusion comes from.

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6. Research Census Records. Decide which census year the ancestor you are working on would most likely be found.
7. Get birth certificates on individuals. These most always show parents and, sometimes, other valuable information, including where the parents were both born, and their occupations.
8. Get marriage licenses and certificates. These show ages, parents, witnesses and, in some cases, where the bride, groom, and their parents were born and their occupations.
9. Get death certificates. They will show death date, birth date, parents, who reported the death, where the deceased person was residing, the cause of death, names of the doctor, and the funeral director.
10. Obtain obituary notices from your local newspaper, library, or county courthouse. The obituary gives family members of the deceased.
11. Church Records may include Baptisms, Marriages, Burials, Confirmation Lists, Communicant Lists, and Membership.
12. Visit cemeteries where your ancestors are buried and look for other family members. Write down all information off of tombstones, even those that may not necessarily apply to your current direct family members. Take a camera along with you and take a picture of the tombstone and the name of the cemetery.
13. Courthouse Probate/Estate Records include wills, intestate proceedings, lists of heirs, inventories/appraisals, final distribution papers, and many more documents.
14. Courthouse Land Records are used to locate the land your ancestors owned or rented and to obtain the description. Land deeds can also be valuable as proof of relationships.
15. County/Town History Books contain information about the history of the area where your ancestor lived. Look for biographical sketches that may mention your ancestor or other family members. These books also include information on schools, churches, public officials, military units, first settlers, etc.
16. Library Research - Many libraries have a genealogy collection of early records of birth, marriage, death, cemetery inscriptions, etc. Be sure to check the periodicals, maps, and atlases.

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17. Genealogical Society - Join a local genealogical society to learn techniques, as well as societies in the area where your ancestors once lived. This will help you in getting together with people of the same interest, hearing talks given by someone knowledgeable in researching specific areas or topics, and learning what is going on in the world of genealogy. Many genealogical societies publish newsletters and aid in locating little known or hidden records.
18. Family History Centers (Church of the Latter Day Saints - also known as Mormons) - Check if there is one in your local area. You can look into their "Family Search" CD-ROM program that includes the International Genealogical Index (IGI), Ancestral File, Social Security Death Index (SSDI), and Family History Library Catalog (FHLC), Military Death Index (Viet Nam, Korean Wars), and the Scottish Church Records.
19. Genealogy Software Programs - Buy a program to documents all your information. There are many available, such as Master Genealogist, Family Tree Maker, Generations Family Tree, etc. Talk with other researchers to get their input on what program they use.
20. Internet - Post queries on the message boards about what or who you are looking for and the time period. You may even make a "cousin" connection. Check out genealogy links on the Internet.
21. Web sites that may be helpful in your research:
 - www.cyndislist.com - this links to county, state, country sites
 - www.familysearch.org - Church of the Latter Day Saints (LDS) site
 - www.rootsweb.com - this one will link you to state and county sites
 - www.usgenweb.com
 - worldconnect.rootsweb.com
 - www.immigrantships.net - this is Immigrant Ships Transcribers Guild
 - www.gengateway.com
 - boards.ancestry.com - this is Rootsweb Message Board
 - www.ancestry.com - some items on this site are accessed only by subscription
22. Always try to verify information that you receive. Errors may even be made on death/birth certificates and tombstones. Check all dates and information, and then make a decision. Remember to share your family genealogy with others. Include telling others where you obtained your information.
23. Always check out sponsors given on birth listings and on marriage certificates. Check out neighbors listed on census reports. These could be relatives. Check out names listed on land transfers and on wills.