

# GENEALOGY 101

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Genealogy -- the study of families and tracing of their lineage and history -- is a popular field these days, especially in the midstate, where there are tons of resources to help budding researchers find out what lies in their family tree past their grandparents' or great-grandparents' generations.

Perhaps you've been interested in exploring your family's roots but are unsure how to begin or what to look for. If that's the case, we, with the help of local experts, put together tips to help you get started.

Start with yourself. Write down everything you know about your immediate family, your parents, siblings and then work backward.

Identify the time period and geographic area in which your ancestors lived. "Genealogical research is, in Pennsylvania and most other states, conducted at the county level," says Pennsylvania genealogy research specialist Stephanie Hoover of PennsylvaniaResearch.com. " You therefore need to know in what county, or at the very least, specific region of PA in which your subject lived.

With that step accomplished, you can then figure out what pertinent resources are available."

Interview your relatives, especially the oldest ones. Questions to ask include: Who is the oldest ancestor you remember? Was he or she born in the U. S. or did they emigrate from another country?

What is the date of birth? What is the spouse's name? What are the names of their children? Do you know their occupation, religious affiliation, or ethnicity? Do you know the date and place of death?

Is there a family Bible? Don't forget to bring along a recorder.

If you're contacting relatives or researchers through the mail, be sure to include a self-addressed stamp envelope. It's considered common courtesy.

Documents to track down include: birth certificates; death certificates and newspaper obituaries; marriage licenses and certificates; church records, including baptisms, marriages, burials, confirmation lists and membership lists; courthouse records, including estate records, wills, appraisals and more.

Use the Internet. There are hundreds of helpful resources online that can offer advice and get you started on your quest. Even the for-pay sites, such as ancestry.com, have freemessage boards, where you can post your queries.

Get out of the house.

"Online resources and subscription databases are great, but you need to see records first-hand to truly know that you've been thorough in your search," Hoover says. "The best information is still held in churches, cemeteries, court houses, historical societies, archives and libraries. Find these facilities in the county of residence of your ancestor, and start digging."

Research census records to find out who the neighbors listed on a census report are. They could be relatives.

Muster rolls, pay records, pension records and death records for military involvement can be found at the county, state and federal Department of Veterans Affairs. FYI: You can order military records from the National Archives for free.

Visit cemeteries where your ancestors are buried. Write down any and all information from the tombstones, even those that might not apply to your current family. Take a picture of the tombstone and the cemetery's name.

Many libraries have a collection of birth, death and other records.

Be organized. "Create a system-- even if it's one file per person-- and stick with it," Hoover says.

Keep a record of every document you receive and include where you got it and the date you obtained it.

There are forms available that can help you record your research, like Pedigree Charts and Correspondence Logs. Most can be found online or via any good genealogy society, according to **Jim McAteer**, president of the Capital Area Genealogical Society.

Find out if there's a genealogical society that meets in your area or one in the area where your ancestors lived. Joining or contacting it can help you in your search as well as introduce you to people who have similar interests, **McAteer** says.

If you opt to hire a professional researcher, make sure he or she knows the local history. "The best tool in the genealogist's toolbox is a thorough knowledge of the history of the area in which your family lived," Hoover says. "If they don't know the local history, they may overlook what is important, or emphasize what is not."

Don't disregard anything you find. Don't presume anything is true or false. You

never know where a potential lead will crop up.

Trust, but verify. Errors abound. " There's a lot of information out there that just isn't true," **McAteer** says.

" Don't ever accept it's true because somebody wrote it in a book."

INFOBOX:

#### ONLINE RESOURCES

Ancestry.com: [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)

Family Search: [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

The PA GenWeb Project: [www.pagenweb.org](http://www.pagenweb.org)

The Geneological Society of Pennsylvania: [www.genpa.org](http://www.genpa.org)

Pennsylvania Research: [pennsylvaniaresearch.com](http://pennsylvaniaresearch.com)

Capital Area Genealogical Society: [www.capitalareagenealogy.org](http://www.capitalareagenealogy.org)

Camp Curtin Historical Society: [www.campcurtin.org](http://www.campcurtin.org)

Cumberland County Historical Society: [www.historicalsociety.com](http://www.historicalsociety.com)

Dauphin County Historical Society: [www.dauphincountyhistory.org](http://www.dauphincountyhistory.org)

Historic Harrisburg Association: [www.historicharrisburg.com](http://www.historicharrisburg.com)

Hershey Derry Township Historical Society: [www.hersheyhistory.org](http://www.hersheyhistory.org)

Historical Society of Perry County: [hsofpc.org](http://hsofpc.org)

Historical Society of Pennsylvania: [www.hsp.org](http://www.hsp.org)

Hummelstown Area Historical Society: [www.hummelstownhistorical.org](http://www.hummelstownhistorical.org)

Lebanon County Historical Society: [lebanoncountyhistoricalsociety.org](http://lebanoncountyhistoricalsociety.org)

West Hanover Twp. Historical Society: [www.westhanover.com/TWP Hist Soc/historical2001.htm](http://www.westhanover.com/TWP_Hist_Soc/historical2001.htm)

York County Heritage Trust: [www.yorkheritage.org](http://www.yorkheritage.org)

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