

A Genealogy Intro

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Do you have a curiosity about your family tree? Many people do. Some may have their interest piqued because of an heirloom, an old picture, or perhaps an unresolved family mystery. The reasons people get hooked on genealogy are many and varied, but each person's search is unique. After all, the search for your ancestors really is a search for yourself.

If you think that family history research requires hours of rummaging through libraries, trekking through cemeteries, and writing letters to government bureaus, you're in for a pleasant surprise. Finding your family tree is simpler than what many people imagine. To be sure, you may encounter some intriguing obstacles. However, most of them can be overcome.

As with so many hobbies today, using a computer can simplify some of the tasks of searching and recording. However, a computer is not necessary. Americans have been recording their ancestry for two centuries or more without digital tools, and you can do the same. All you need is a starting point and a direction, and maybe a few tips.

In the beginning ... there's you!

Starting a family tree search is very simple: begin with what you know about yourself, and then work backwards, one generation at a time. Linking back from yourself through the generations helps to ensure that the people you research actually belong in your family tree and don't simply have the same name as one of your ancestors. The unfortunate souls who try to skip a generation may well find themselves perched in the wrong family tree.

Write down the information that you already know. A basic pedigree chart will help. You can find these at genealogy societies and at most libraries, as well as on a number of Web sites. You can find such charts at https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Genealogy_Research_Forms and at <http://www.ancestry.com/download/charts> and at <https://www.archives.gov/research/genealogy/charts-forms/> (where it is called an “Ancestral Form.”)

Place yourself in the first position on the chart, and fill in the vital information: your name, the date and place of your birth, as well as the date and place of any marriages you have had. Next, move back one generation, and fill in the same information for both of your parents: name, date and place of birth, date and place of marriage, and date and place of death, if deceased.

Continue working back even further, to grandparents and great-grandparents, if possible. Very few beginning genealogists can fill in the basic facts on even three generations, let alone four. Simply fill in what you already know, and leave the remaining facts as blank spaces. You can fill them in later as you uncover clues.

Once you exhaust your own memory, a family fact-finding expedition is a great way to gather more information. Pick the brains of your family members, especially older family members. Take along a notebook, and write down the events they remember. Ask around for photos, letters, newspaper clippings, and so on. The memorabilia you find will surprise and delight you.

So far, you’ve relied on people’s recollections to add to your history. We all know, however, that memories are not always exact. Next, you will need to confirm the date and place of birth, date and place of marriage, name of spouse, date and place of death, names of parents and children, for as many individuals as possible. You will be surprised how easy it is to find birth certificates and

marriage records, especially in the United States. Our country has a long tradition of recording and preserving these vital records.

Now you are ready to set an achievable target from the myriad facts you have accumulated. Pick an ancestor, perhaps one with a few blanks on the chart. Next, choose a question you would like to answer, such as the town where he or she was born. Then decide where you will start hunting.

A birth certificate is an obvious objective. However, you may also need to look in a wide range of places to find out more about that person's life. When the location of birth is not easily found, you can look for other records that will help identify the person's origins. Some of the places you can look are census records, military records and pensions, land records, schooling, occupation, electoral rolls, sporting clubs, newspaper reports – in fact, the list of places where you may find clues is almost endless.

Generally speaking, it's easier to search through indexes and compiled records that are available on the Internet at the beginning of your family tree discovery tour. Always keep in mind that not all the genealogy information is available online!

Even if you don't own a computer, many libraries today provide computers with Internet access for just such purposes. One of the greatest resources available is that of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, usually referred to as the Mormons. This church has microfilmed millions of records from all over the world, and indexes to these microfilms are available on their Web site, www.familysearch.org. The Mormons gather records from all faiths and all ethnic groups and make these records available to everyone, regardless of religious orientation. Best of all, you can reserve and view the microfilms at a local Mormon Family History Center near where you live. The films ship straight from

Salt Lake City to your local Center, where volunteers can help you with the microfilm readers. While there, you will not be given any religious materials or lectures (unless you ask). You can find the Family History Center closest to your location if you start at <https://familysearch.org/locations/>.

Wherever you turn up information about your ancestors, always check the “facts” that you find. Many times you will obtain a piece of information that later turns out to be inaccurate. Never believe anything until you can verify it! You need to treat all verbal information — as well as most of the genealogy information on the internet — as “clues to what might be true.” Then, armed with this newly-found information, seek out an original record of the event that corroborates what you found earlier.

Once your tree starts bearing fruit, you will probably find that a computer can be a tremendous help in keeping track of all your people, events, and dates. Today’s computers and software are priced to fit most any budget, and they can save weeks and even months of work. If you decide to use a computer, it’s a good idea to choose a genealogy program sooner rather than later — even if you have collected only a few family details. These programs help to organize information about individual ancestors, as well as their relationships to others in the family tree. These programs will make it much easier for you to visualize the connections between people through their capability to automatically generate charts and even point out potential discrepancies.

Information about many genealogy programs may be found by starting at <https://blog.eogn.com/category/software/>. A list of Macintosh genealogy programs may be found at <https://blog.eogn.com/2016/03/18/genealogy-software-for-the-macintosh/>. Genealogy Apps for Android and Chromebooks may

be found at <https://blog.eogn.com/2016/05/31/genealogy-apps-for-android-and-chromebooks/>.

A search for your family tree can be one of the most fascinating and rewarding pursuits of your life. Who knows what you will find? Nobility? Heroes? Or horse thieves? Most of us can find all three in our ancestry. Who is lurking in your family tree?