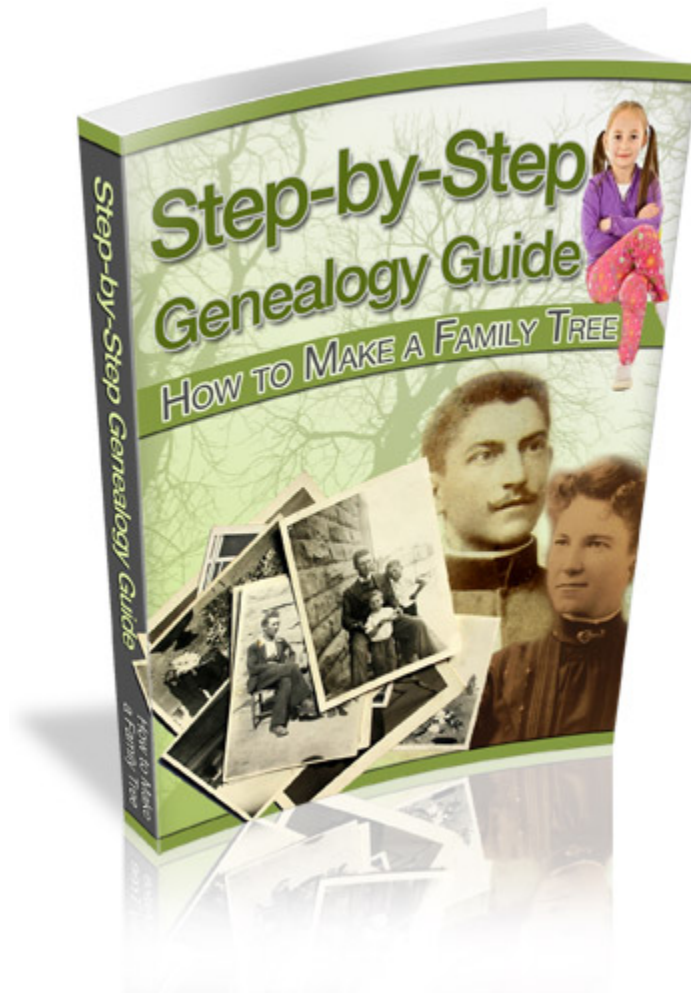


Step-by-Step Genealogy Guide

How to Make a Family Tree



**A Genealogy Guide for the
Rest of Us!**

A CHC PRODUCTION

The Step-by-Step Genealogy Guide

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This guide is your starting point. There are hundreds of chapters in dozens of books to read about getting started in genealogy research. These first five will get you started.

How to Use this Guide

Now I'm assuming you've come here to learn a thing or two. If you want to know about the history of Genealogy or why it is important you will have to look elsewhere. You've likely already read stuff like that or are just not interested.

If I'm completely wrong and you do want to read about the history of Genealogy and why it is important, I suggest you visit the site below.

<http://www.genealogybeginner.com/genealogy-history/history-of-genealogy.html>

That web-page will provide you with an introduction to the history of genealogy as first written about in [Family Chronicle Magazine](#). Don't get me wrong. I'm a big fan of the roots of genealogy and a subscription to Family Chronicle will provide a good bi-monthly read. However, that isn't the purpose of this guide. I don't want to drag you fluff when what you want is clear answers on how to get started.

That said, this guide is short, targeted, and designed to give you tricks and tips you can take away with you after a couple hours of reading. I don't expect everything to be new to you. But if I can provide you with a few new ideas and hold your attention long enough to get you from random anxiety to focused progress, then the effort will have been worth both our time.

Questions, Compliments, & Criticisms

This guide is updated and modified as new information is available. However, it is possible that I've missed something critical to the first timer. If you see a hole in our outline, let me know.

Email me at [clegg \(at\) genealogybeginner.com](mailto:clegg@genealogybeginner.com)

I would love to hear from you. Your questions, compliments, and criticisms are always welcome.

Additional Resources

This guide provides a link to all of the sources referenced at the end of each chapter. To visit these links, type the URL into your Internet browser or visit an online index where all the links are "live" at the URL below.

<http://www.genealogybeginner.com/customers>

Chapter 1:

GETTING STARTED AND WHERE TO SEARCH

Genealogical information abounds on the Web. What would have taken months of research and letter writing previously can now be accomplished within a few minutes. Even so, be prepared to wade through volumes of genealogical data in an effort to find one piece to your puzzle.

Short Introduction

A genealogy search marks the beginning of a private adventure into your own history. You'll find delightful surprises, family secrets and heartaches. The treasures you find will be enjoyed by generations who follow.

In this guide we'll talk to you about writing down everything you know about your family history. You begin with yourself and work backward to your parents and their parents.

Note: You don't include your Aunts, Uncles, or Cousins in your family tree. Not everyone agrees with this. Some feel that to ignore your extended family is to miss out on great leads and a rich part of your heritage. I believe success comes from focus. Explore all leads and sources but don't get confused by trying to include your extended family. This is your tree.

You'll search for documents that can verify family stories - birth certificates, military records, wills, marriage licenses, and deeds.

We'll talk in detail about how to plan a family reunion or otherwise visit with relatives to obtain all the information you can. We'll talk about a visit to your local courthouse to learn about searching public records. We'll address countless genealogy search web sites and look through their database for your family information.

You can [hire a professional](#) genealogy search company to find missing ancestors when your own leads are exhausted. But I know that after you've gathered your initial information, you'll focus on one ancestor at a time. You'll be more successful and get less discouraged if you research one person at a time. Ready? OK, let's get started.

Get Your Paperwork in Order. To start, have your family history information handy. It should be focused on you and work backward toward your parents and then their parents. You can organize the most obvious family history information using a simple organizational chart format. It should start with you and branch backward including the names you know.

See the references section at the end of this chapter for the web address of [Family Tree Magazine's](#) index of free, download-able forms to help organize your family history.

Download the first sheet and fill out what you can. You will be #1 and your mother and father will follow. If you know about your grandparents, great; if not, don't fret. Once you've interviewed yourself, it's time to speak with your family.

Speaking with Your Family. Family members remain one of the best beginning sources of knowledge in your genealogy search. However, like any serious research effort, you should be organized before sitting down with your family

For many, family interviews are the least expensive and most rewarding tool in any genealogy project. The ten steps below when followed carefully, will make the most of your family interviews.

1. Write down all the names you know on both sides of your parents' families. Begin with your name and work backward to your parents and then their parents.
2. Find your birth certificate. This contains your parents' legal names and birth dates.

Note: A good family tree will have an official document that verifies every name, birth date, date of marriage, and year of death. Start with yourself by making a copy of your own birth certificate. Ask your parents for theirs and get copies made. Your ultimate goal is to obtain these official records and have a physical copy on file for every name on your family tree.

3. Contact your parents, if possible, and solicit their help with names and dates. You'll likely find names of relatives you've never heard of but who were an integral part of your parents' early childhood experiences.
4. Check with your parents to see if they'll let you look through their family legal records (birth certificates, death certificates, military records). Make photocopies and return the originals to a safe place.
5. Go through old family photo albums. Look for writing on the backs and below the photos in the albums.

6. Look at framed photographs. Sometimes something such as an obituary notice is stored behind a photo in a picture frame.
7. Examine journals. Leaf through old books looking for notes written in them or papers placed between the pages. These are often found in old trunks in attics, but can even be found on everyday bookshelves.
8. Look behind old mirrors and pull out dresser drawers and look for taped messages.
9. Visit or call your relatives. Tell them what you're doing and what you've discovered. In most cases, they'll be delighted to help with your search and want to add missing names and dates.
10. Solicit stories from relatives. You'll find lots of treasured tales this way. This information can be added to a "note" section about each ancestor. These stories transform an ordinary genealogy into a piece of art.

Family members are sometimes reluctant to provide information for whatever reason. Be prepared for this, and remember that the living is more important than the dead. (We'll address this more in later chapters.)

Initial Databases. Next, visit the helpful sites that exist simply for your use in genealogical research. These sites contain databases and search capabilities that can quickly aid in determining whether you are on the right path in your search.

A popular place to start is with [GeneaNet](#) (see reference for website address; makes sure you click on the American/ English flag on the right to access the English language version of the site). GeneaNet is a universal collection of databases and search resources online and off-line.

If you don't know about it already, it is time to become familiar with the Latter Day Saints' extensive Web site, which covers parts of Europe, the East Coast and North America for several generations. The Latter Day Saints are renowned for their work in genealogy (It has been said that the LDS has genealogical records dating back to 1200 AD; see end of chapter). Although records have been found dating back to a person in Europe in 1200 A.D., the Latter Day Saints' Web site information is not as complete as the CD databases available at public genealogy libraries or at their own genealogy libraries located in most major cities around the world.

Note: In Chapter 3 we discuss searching public records in detail, including how to get free, professional, one-on-one assistance.

Chapter 5 offers more information about the LDS website plus provides extensive details about getting the most of an actual visit to the library.

Set a specific goal for each search session (i.e., the one hour you have on Sunday before junior wakes up from his nap) Try to narrow your search and only look at those items that are closely related to your quest. It is possible to spend many fascinating, yet useless hours chasing information. Try to remain focused on your search.

Government Sources. Did you know that you can use the [Social Security Administration's database](#)? It is an excellent source in the United States. This can be accessed easily through the genealogical research Web sites.

Check the Library of Congress and public libraries' book catalogs on the Web. Run a search for books that contain your family name in the title or in the author's name. Sometimes historical books on a particular period, such as books on immigration through Ellis Island, offer links to your personal history. (We'll provide more on government records and accessing the Ellis Island database of immigrants, for free, in Chapter 3.)

Leaning on the Work of Others. Search for your family name followed by the word "family" (i.e., "Smith family") using your favorite search engine. This will connect you to countless Web sites of family searches that have gone on before you. It's possible that one side of your family heritage has already been researched.

This gets you going. If your feeling overwhelmed at this point, go back to the beginning of this chapter and re-read "Getting Your Paperwork in Order" and just do the first step. Then make sure you review the resources at the end of this chapter (next page).

Next we take a fun excursion and talk about visiting a cemetery (and talking to an actual Crypt Keeper!). We'll follow this with a detailed step-by-step guide to searching free public records (online and off-line).

References

Go to <http://www.genealogybeginner.com/customers> for these and other links.

Websites:

- Family Tree Magazine – This group has a great index of professional forms you can use to quickly get yourself organized.
<http://www.familytreemagazine.com/forms/download.html>
- Family Search – This website database is supported by the LDS (Church of Latter Day Saints) and is considered by some to be the best place to start.
<http://www.familysearch.org/>
- Genealogical Database Network – “Our Mission is to set up a worldwide register of genealogical resources and make the power of the Internet available to our users.”
<http://www.geneanet.org>
- Social Security Administration – You can search the records of the US Social Security Office from a number of sources. One popular source is at RootsWeb.
<http://ssdi.genealogy.rootsweb.com/>
- Library of Congress
<http://www.loc.gov/>

Action Items

This first set of action items will get you started. We're only cracking the surface here. Take it slow. Let go of any self-imposed deadlines. Make sure you have fun. You'll stick with it over the long run so long as you enjoy yourself.

To Do:

Task 1: Download the first worksheet off of Family Tree Magazine titled, "Five Generation Ancestor Chart" and fill it out to as much as you can.

<http://www.familytreemagazine.com/forms/download.html>

- You are #1. Fill this in and make a copy of the appropriate official documents. Start a filing system for these documents.
- Your parents are #2 and #3. Do the same for them as you did for yourself.
- Your Grandparents are #4, #5, #6, and #7.

Task 2: If they are still living, call or sit down with your parents and ask them to help you fill out the information for them and their parents.

Hint: Put everything in pencil until you have proof that it's a fact. Then use a pen. This will serve as a great reference when you start to accumulate workbooks of information.

Something is considered a "fact" only when you have authentic supporting documentation such as a birth certificate or marriage license.

Task 3: Call your Aunts and Uncles and ask them to do the same thing.

Task 4: With this initial paperwork in hand (you'll want to get a notebook eventually), visit the public and private databases in this chapter.

Become familiar with how these sites work. Try to fill in information about your great grandparents (you've probably got fairly complete information on your grandparents from your own parents, aunts, and uncles at this point).

Note that you are always welcome to contact me directly with individual questions. I can't guarantee I'll have the answers but I'll give it a

shot. (And if you stump me, I'll go find the answer and get back to you.)

CHAPTER 2: HOW TO COMPLETE A FAMILY TREE CHART

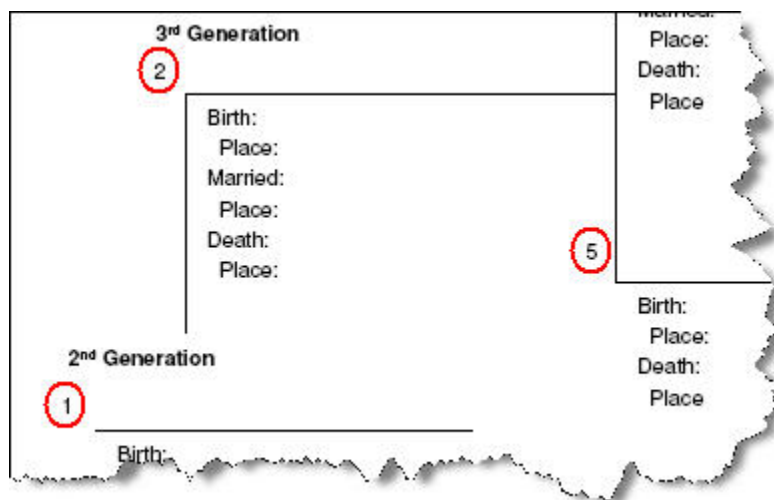
There are a lot of different types of family tree charts. The chart you downloaded with this ebook is called a Six-Generation Pedigree Chart. Really what that means is that it is a basic way to track your family tree going back six generations (we'll explain the generation part shortly).

Don't get caught up in how things look. At the beginning stages, you want to focus on getting solid information about your ancestors. When you've gone back a ways, you can then turn your attention to developing a formal, beautiful archive. You can give your records to a professional scrapbook maker or similar modern day scribe to cull your research into a true work of art your family will cherish.

For now, we're focused on content and filling out a family tree chart properly.

Mastering the Six-Generation Family Tree Chart. To get things rolling, you need to understand the different parts of the chart and how they all come together as a research tool. Make sure you have a print out of the chart in front of you.

First off, you'll need to understand the numbers for each entry. These are the numbers next to the lines on the chart.



Each of these number represents a person you will be searching for. Once you've found this person, you'll enter their information on the line next to the number. (We'll talk about who these people are in a little bit.) The second generation on the first chart is you!

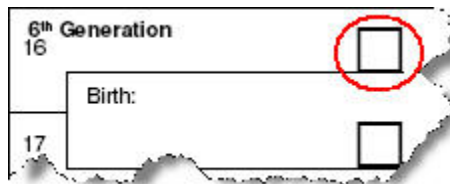
Next let's discuss the "Chart Number", this is the number you enter in the upper left hand side of the page.



If you are just getting started, you'll put a number one here. The idea is that when you reach the 6th generation you'll use the chart number to continue on to subsequent generations. This begs further explanation.

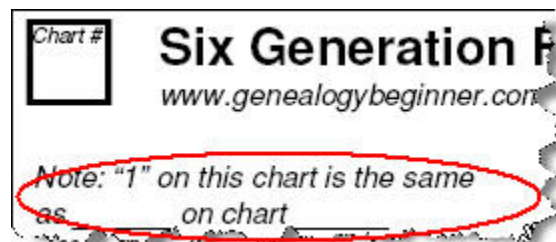
First off, notice how the chart fans out as you move to the right. Like branches of a tree, the chart starts with a single line (you) and "branches out" to two others, these each have two added, and then another two and the overall "tree" expands exponentially. On the example in front of you, while it is only six generations, at the sixth generation, your looking at 16 great-great grandparents (more on this later).

When you do get to the sixth generation, you continue on to the seventh by moving to a new chart. For example, take person 16, the first line under the 6th generation column (the most top-right "slot"). See the box to the right of this line?



This box is used to reference the "chart number" that is used to continue on from the current chart. So, if you were going to start to log ancestors for the great-great grandparent in this spot, you might put a "2" in this box and then when you print out a second six-generation pedigree chart, you'd put a "2" in the the top-left "Chart #" box.

This is where the script under the "Chart #" box comes in.



If this was chart #2 and intended as a continuation to the person in slot number 16 on Chart #1 than we'd make a note here to say that "1 on this chart is the same as 16 on chart

1". The "1 on this chart" refers to slot number one or the first person for whom you are listing information. If you were continuing the tree on to the seventh generation than you would simply copy the information for person 16 on Chart 1 to person 1 on Chart 2. Make sense? A bit confusing if this is the first time you are hearing this but give it a try and think through the logic of it all and it'll come together.

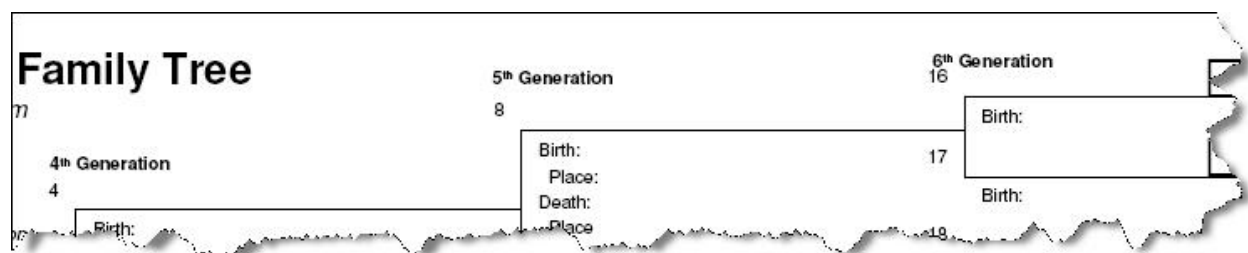
Step-by-Step: Generations One Through Three. With these basics on the parts of the chart in place, we can talk about the actual generations and who you fill in. The first slot, slot number one on the first chart, chart number one is you! That's right, get things started by writing your name down next to item one.

Now... here's the thing, write your name there in pencil. This is a secret that many professional genealogists use to keep track of what formal records they have on file. When they have a hunch or even a pretty good idea of who should go on the tree, they put the name and any other information about the person in pencil. Then, when they have the formal documentation on file to prove it, they switch the information to pen. Pretty neat huh? This makes it so much easier to know what you've researched completely and what you're exploring as leads.

You see, for each person you enter (even yourself) you want to have up to three files on hand. A birth certificate, a marriage certificate, and a death certificate. These documents will provide you with what you need to confirm the next generation back. The birth certificate is the most critical and as you can see, as you move further out on the chart, this becomes the only item you're expected to maintain. Why? because the birth certificate will list the Mother and Father. These names will define the next generation back and get you going on your next search.

So, you've got yourself in slot one. If you have children they are technically the 1st generation on your tree so list them below. You're the second generation, and your parents are the third generation. List your Father as person 2 and your mother as person 3. There you have it. Generations one through three complete. Now it's time to move on to generations four through six.

Step-by-Step: Generations Four Through Six. The fourth generation is your grandparents. You'll see that there are four slots for each of the four grandparents. Two for your Father's folks and two for your Mother's folks. You'll likely be able to get this far with a little work (but not too much). If you're lucky enough to have your parents living (or even your grandparents) than you can speak to them directly. Later chapters in this guide will help you with how to interview your family to get this critical genealogy information.



The fifth generation, your grandparents' parents (or your great grandparents) is where you'll likely have to start to do some research (also detailed later in this guide - along with a lot of great free resources). This will include eight people and you'll fill them in to slots 8 through 15 as appropriate.

Finally the sixth generation is where you'll start to develop some research skills and have to dig in. You have the information from prior records to get hints to towns, dates, and other items about when and where people were born. As you learn about your great-great grandparents, you'll have developed a total of 31 people. The subsequent chapters in this guide will tell you how to locate public sources in these local areas (without having to visit them personally) to get you the information you need.

Seven Generations and Beyond. And when you have the sixth generation completed, where do you go from there? You start a new chart and tackle the next six generations (bringing you to 12 generations back when you complete it). If you do this for each of your great-great grandparents, you'll have seventeen pedigree charts and really have a full boat of research to tackle. This is how people spend a lifetime developing their family trees.

There is a whole lot more to the art of genealogy. Many genealogists (professional and hobbyists) will archive pictures, family stores, and other records such as deeds, military service records, immigration papers, and other documents that represent the record of a family's history. However, these are the basics of building a family tree and I hope you find it lays the foundation for the rest of this guide.

So... you have no excuse. Read on to the next chapter, follow the action items at the end of each to keep yourself going, and use the links after each subsequent chapter to visit the online research tools. I've tried to identify the free resources so you can minimize your costs.

CHAPTER 3:

SEARCHING CEMETERIES

In order to search at cemeteries, you'll need to overcome the long-standing idea that they're places of sorrow. In your search, the cemetery is an important connection to your heritage and an exciting way to keep the memory of your ancestors alive. Many cemeteries have indexed their gravestone markings for online search.

How to Start. A good place to start is with an examination of family records for indications of where your ancestors are buried. Remember to check through financial records for information on burial arrangements. From here you can go through the microfiche of newspapers in the area at the time of your ancestor's death. Check the obituaries as well as the advertisements for cemeteries that were operating at that time.

Hint: Look in the yellow pages for cemeteries that boast that they've been operating for more than 50 years (or however long ago the burial occurred).

Find the books in genealogy libraries that contain listings of all currently operating cemeteries within the continental United States. A genealogy library is any library with a special collection focusing on genealogy. You can find a fairly comprehensive listing of genealogy libraries across the United States at:

http://www.gwest.org/gen_libs.htm

Cemeteries Online. You can also check online under "cemeteries." There are more than 4,000 listings of individual cemeteries that have created their own Web pages.

For example, Halifax County (Canada) has created an index of gravestones for most cemeteries in the county. You can review this index online (see references). Don't forget to look for land information through the census, property and tax records if your family owned land. Your ancestors may be buried in a small, family cemetery. Also check with the local historical society.

You should also visit the National Cemetery Administration's National Gravesite Locator database online (see reference). I'll talk more about this in the next chapter when we introduce you to Searching Public Records.

Visiting a Cemetery. Inquire at the cemeteries in the area where your ancestor lived for any records of his or her burial. Check also to see if they took over from an older cemetery with another name. Ask for names of other funeral homes that you can investigate.

While on location you can also request to look at the plat book (a layout of the burial grounds) at the cemetery. If one isn't available, you can create your own map by walking around the cemetery. Make sure you ask to see the original documents at the cemetery. Books or surveys made later often contain only limited information. Many gravestones reference spouses and children.

Don't let this information go unrecorded. Make gravestone rubbings and take photographs of your ancestor's grave to add tangible proof to your records. With this rubbing as "proof on file" you can change the pedigree chart from pencil to pen! Often you'll need to clean the headstone first, so dress accordingly and bring cleaning supplies with you.

Cleaning Headstones. Be careful. Different types of stone require different types of cleanings. You'll want to clean the stone before taking a rubbing to make sure you get a clean record. However if you do it wrong, you'll end up with more than a mess on your hands. In many cases, you can find a local monument company to do the cleaning for you. However it can cost well over \$500.

Michael Graves maintains a website that has some great, simple instructions on how to clean headstones along with amazing before and after pictures (see references).

Remember that in past centuries, almost all people were buried according to ethnic origin or religious affiliation. Don't waste your time looking in a Presbyterian cemetery for a Catholic ancestor.

REFERENCES

Go to <http://www.genealogybeginner.com/customers> for these and other links.

Websites:

- Index of United States Genealogy Libraries
http://www.gwest.org/gen_libs.htm
- Halifax County Cemetery Index
<http://www.rootsweb.com/~nshalifa/Cemeteries.html>
- Michael Graves – Cleaning headstones
<http://www.tsgraves.com/relics/headstone.htm>
- National Cemetery Administration > Gravesite Locator – “Search for burial locations of veterans and their dependents in VA National Cemeteries, state veterans cemeteries and various other Department of Interior and military cemeteries.”
http://gravelocator.cem.va.gov/j2ee/servlet/NGL_v1

ACTION ITEMS

The tasks for this section are designed to get you away from the computer and “in the field”.

To Do:

Task 1: Review your current charts and paperwork and focus your attention on places of birth and death.

Task 2: Starting with your deceased grandparents (or great grandparents if you’re lucky), identify the town where they died and search obituaries at your library (get microfilm on the local paper; you might have to use the inter-library loan system) and search local yellow pages for cemeteries. Call the cemetery beforehand to ask how long they have been in service (don't waste a visit on a cemetery that wasn't in service when you're ancestor passed).

Task 3: Document proof of their life by creating a rubbing of their gravestone. Clean the gravestone first so you get a good impression.

Chapter 4: SEARCHING PUBLIC RECORDS

Side Note: Don't skip chapters. If you haven't laid the groundwork outlined in Chapter 1 and haven't had a little fun and adventure with Chapter 2, Chapter 3 will be overwhelming. Do it slowly. Do it right. Have fun.

Once you have your basic parental information, researching public records can confirm the information you have and aid in finding additional information. Start with a trip to your local library and request help with getting online to access the public genealogy database of a public genealogy library. (A genealogy library is any library that has a special collections dedicated to genealogy research.)

These databases are accessible through most public libraries. If you have access to a genealogy library, this is the premier place to go. The secret to keep in mind when visiting a public library is to utilize the staff at the libraries. They can quickly direct you to resources that will provide answers to your search if you tell them what you need. The staff at your local library has been trained specifically in search techniques. It's their job to know where the resources are located.

Legal Names and Birth Dates. If you don't have a specific set of questions in mind, you can use the visit to request information on searching through the [Social Security database](#), where you can obtain vital information about your U.S. relatives. This database is good for all relatives who died after about 1961. For relatives who died previous to this time, you'll need to write the Social Security office.

Any United States citizen living in the US on or after 1936 is required by law to have obtained a Social Security Card. A Social Security Card is obtained by filing a Social Security Application. Social Security Applications are a part of the public record.

Request a copy of the Social Security application of a relative to get access to his or her parents' legal names and birth dates. To do this, you'll need to write a letter to:

Social Security Administration
Office of Central Records Operation
FOIA Workgroup
P.O. Box 17772
300 N. Greene Street

Baltimore, MD 21290

(As of this writing, the current cost was \$7.)

Office of Vital Records. Obtain the addresses of the Office of Vital Records, Department of Health in applicable capital cities of states or countries. Order copies of birth and death certificates from these offices.

The website www.vitalrec.com should be your first stop here. This site contains a comprehensive listing by US state of the mailing address, online ordering, and cost estimates for ordering vital records online and off-line.

You can also do a search in Google by state. Type "vital records <STATE NAME>" and visit the state government website that comes up.

Department of Veteran's Affairs. Access the Department of Veteran's Affairs' fascinating military-record information. Its records are extensive, but be prepared to provide the Social Security number or other identifying number for the person you're researching. (The National Personnel Records Center has a database of millions of military service records.)

The goal here is to use the military records to get information about your relatives' service record, medals, birth and death, place of residence, spouses, and children. The Veterans' Affairs Department in your state may be able to assist you, as well. The Veterans' Affairs Department should be in the phone book under Government agencies.

In addition to the National and State Veteran's Affairs office, you can search at:

- The National Archives > National Personal Records
- The National Cemetery Administration

It is especially important that you become familiar with the National Personal Records Center. The National Personnel Records Center, Military Personnel Records (NPRC-MPR) is a database of millions of military service records and can provide vital information on military personnel health, medical records of discharged and deceased veterans of all services during the 20th century. Military records prior to the 20th century are listed in Washington, D.C. at the National Archives, Military Records Holding (see references)

The U.S. Census. Look into [Census Bureau records](#) dating back to 1745. Microfilm can be found at a genealogy library as well as for rent or purchase. Records are categorized in what is known as a Soundex system. Films are

filed by census year, then state, then Soundex number. (Soundex is a name indexing method used by the US Census from 1880 to 1920.)

The Soundex system is a method of indexing names in the 1880, 1900, 1910, and 1920 US Census. Soundex can also aid genealogists by identifying spelling variations for a given surname. The website RootsWeb.com has a form that will return the Soundex code for the entered surname, plus other surnames/spellings sharing the same Soundex code.

<http://resources.rootsweb.com/cgi-bin/soundexconverter>

The U.S. Census Bureau has an interesting position on Genealogy. They state:

"Although censuses are a source of genealogical information, the Census Bureau does not provide these data. The Census Bureau is not able to locate missing persons, or provide recent information on individuals. In keeping with the Census Bureau's commitment to confidentiality, the Census Bureau information collected in the Decennial Census of Population and Housing on individuals does not become available to the public until after 72 years."

The only service they explicitly report to provide to genealogy searchers is the "Age Search Service". The fee for this service was \$65 at the time of this writing. Details on the Age Search Service can be found on their web page (see references).

Local Courthouse. Visit your local courthouse and research how to find family information through records such as deeds; birth, marriage and death certificates; and wills.

Courthouse records are local. Therefore, this public source will be a waste of your time unless you've been able to pin down your ancestors to a particular place at a particular time. Kimberly Powell has a great article at about.com on this very topic. (See References)

Other Public Record Sources. Check with fraternal organizations such as:

- The Knights of Columbus
- Freemasons (see references)
- The Grange

If your ancestors were a part of any of these groups, you will likely find a wealth of information by contact the group coordinators directly.

You should also check records from the main ports of entry into the United States. These links connect you to your roots overseas.

- New York, New York (see references)
- Galveston, Texas
- Key West, Florida
- Plymouth, Massachusetts
- San Francisco, California

Finally, when it comes to public records, don't ignore the church records in the areas where your ancestors lived. Many contain baptismal and marriage records that can aid in your search.

Regardless of where you're searching, be prepared to wait awhile for the processing of the public certificates. This process can easily take two months or more.

REFERENCES

Go to <http://www.genealogybeginner.com/customers> for these and other links.

Websites:

- Social Security Death Index
<http://www.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=3693>
- Vitalrec – A comprehensive resource for ordering vital records online and off line.
<http://vitalrec.com/>
- Google Online Search Engine
<http://www.google.com/>
- US Department of Veterans Affairs
<http://www.va.gov/>
- Veteran Affairs Offices by State:
<http://www.va.gov/Partners/stateoffice/index.htm>
- The National Archives, National Personal Records – For military records from the 20th century.
<http://www.archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel/>
- National Archives, Military Records Holding – For military records prior to the 20th century.
<http://www.archives.gov/research/order/vets-records.html#nara>
- National Cemetery Administration, Gravesite Locator
http://gravelocator.cem.va.gov/j2ee/servlet/NGL_v1
- Obtaining Military Records and Medals
<http://www.cem.va.gov/records.htm>
- US Census – Genealogy Information
<http://www.census.gov/genealogy/www/>
- RootsWeb.com Soundex Converter
<http://resources.rootsweb.com/cgi-bin/soundexconverter>

- US Census – Age Search Service
<http://www.census.gov/genealogy/www/agesearch.html>
- Finding Your Ancestors in Court Records; Kimberly Powell
http://genealogy.about.com/cs/court_records/a/courthouse.htm
- Knights of Columbus
<http://www.kofc.org/about/museum/index.cfm>
- Freemasons – there is not a lot of top level organizational information available about Freemasonry. A good overview and starting point can be found at:
<http://www.crystalinks.com/freemasons.html>

ACTION ITEMS

The tasks from this chapter are all about getting down to business and filling in the blanks. You may likely spend years working through the resources and suggestions in this chapter. This is normal. Genealogy is as much about the process as it is the results.

To Do:

Task 1: Use your yellow pages book to identify up to 5 local libraries. Call each and ask if any of the staff has a degree in library sciences. The one with the best answer deserves your first visit.

Remember, it is a librarian's job to know where information is. Make your local, educated librarian your friend.

Task 2: Use the [Social Security Administration](#) to find legal names and birth dates. This will be vital in future public records search.

Task 3: Search out your state office of vital records and become familiar with the resources offered.

Task 4: If you have any indication that a particular family member has a military background, visit the resources outlined in this chapter.

Chapter 5: HOW TO HOLD A GENEALOGY FAMILY REUNION

Gathering genealogy information at a family reunion is a rewarding experience. Not only can you share time with loved ones, but also meet new relatives.

The stories you gather at these meetings add spice to your genealogy records, and the reunion itself becomes part of the lore of family history. Pulling it all together can be a challenge. This chapter is dedicated to making it more pleasure than pain.

Reunion Committee. Begin by forming a reunion committee. Choose a small group of family members whom you like - this will make the reunion planning as enjoyable as the actual event. A reunion committee will take some of the pressure off you to make it all come together.

Once identified, you will need to call the selected members to see if they'll agree to participate. When you make your first contact, make sure you have a date and site (or means of meeting) figured out for the first meeting. This will make the scheduling process go a lot quicker.

You'll find your family members will be more likely to get involved if you have a rough agenda worked out for the first meeting. Present this as a recommended agenda and allow its contents to be open for debate. You probably want to target up to 5 people for the first meeting.

Reunion Committee Agenda. Whether by phone, email, or in-person, your "reunion committee" will have to work through the following tasks:

1. Have the first task of the committee be to set a date for the reunion. Often a holiday or anniversary works best as people are already planning to take time to get together with others. (An upcoming wedding might be perfect. Weddings often bring people together anyways.)
2. Make a group decision on the reunion's location. A park or meaningful historical site can be particularly captivating to a family.

Depending on the size of the reunion, members will often volunteer to have it at their home. Hotels are set up to cater to large groups of people and can be used as a backup.

Other important things to keep in mind when choosing a location

include:

- Distance
- Convenience
- Accessibility
- Affordability
- Accommodations
- Features and Activities

(see the reference section for an article on each of these things to consider)

3. Decide on a budget, which will determine the scale of the food, decorations, accommodations, and activities for the reunion. The committee doesn't have to pay for it all. Ask everyone to pitch in by buying a "ticket" to the reunion.
4. Plan the events that you want. Think about activities that will further the family knowledge of shared heritage and bind the group together.

Consider, for example, a story-telling hour, a photo-sharing table, and a central genealogy chart where blanks can be updated by family members.

5. Create a mailing list of all the relatives that you have on your genealogy chart or, if you are just beginning, go through the phone books of the various committee members. This should include names, addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses. (Make sure your family knows it is a "Genealogy Reunion".)
6. Decide on subsequent committee meeting dates and locations.

With these preliminaries out of the way, you can focus your attention on contacting the family members by sending out invitations by letter, e-mail or phone.

Hint: Make it clear that you are planning a genealogy reunion and that you would like them to bring family history, photos, collectibles and stories to share with other family members.

At the Reunion. Print up a program of the scheduled reunion events to give to family members as they arrive.

Kimberly Powell suggests 10 great, inexpensive activities for you to consider at the reunion.

- Memory T-Shirts
- Photo Swap
- Family Scavenger Hunt
- Family Tree Wall Chart
- Heritage Cookbook
- Story time
- Tour into the Past
- Family History Skits & Re-enactments
- Oral History Odyssey
- Memorabilia Table

(See the reference section for links to more information about each of these events.)

Hire a professional photographer or a video-camera operator to film the reunion, or assign an experienced family member this task. The event will eventually become part of your shared family history and having it recorded will make it all the more valuable.

Get a volunteer or volunteers at the reunion to issue a newsletter afterward that includes stories, photos and news items from the reunion. You can then send the newsletter together with an updated genealogy chart to all the attendees as well as to those less fortunate family members who were not able to attend. A Professional photographer will assure the smiles are recorded.

If you give yourself plenty of time to plan for the event, organizing it will actually be fun and entertaining. You'll find additional resources in the references section of this chapter to help further your planning.

Reunion Warning. When planning events, food, accommodations, and invitations, be aware of the cost of such activities. You can easily get into trouble financially if you are not careful.

REFERENCES

Go to <http://www.genealogybeginner.com/customers> for these and other links.

Websites:

- Family Reunion Activities
http://genealogy.about.com/od/family_reunions/a/activities.htm
- Family Reunion Planning Site
<http://www.family-reunion.com/>
- Steps to a Successful Family Reunion
http://genealogy.about.com/od/family_reunions/a/planning.htm
- Considering a Family Reunion Location
http://genealogy.about.com/od/family_reunions/f/locations.htm
- Help with family reunions
<http://www.ancestry.com/learn/library/article.aspx?article=1841>
- Family reunion checklist
<http://www.genealogyforum.rootsweb.com/gfaol/reunion/Checklist.htm>

ACTION ITEMS

These tasks are here to get your planning going and to minimize the stress. Just do it.

To Do:

Task 1: Who's your buddy? Sit down with the family member you're closest to and share your plans. Ask them to be the first member of the reunion committee and together, list out who the other committee members should be.

Task 2: Send each desired committee member a letter or email describing what you want to do. If they agree, send them the agenda for the first meeting.

Task 3: Hold your first meeting. Even if it's a short email discussion loop, get people involved. It's OK if it takes 4 to 6 meetings to get all the details on the agenda worked out.

Task 4: Enjoy yourself. Your reunion can become a regular event and part of your family traditions. Every 5 years might be just right. (**Hint:** You don't have to chair the committee every time!)

Chapter 6: Visiting the LDS Utah Center

Note: We present this last section because the LDS maintains the largest collection of genealogy archives in the world. We do not take a public opinion on the Church of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) either way. We neither support nor withhold our support. That is for you to decide. Our job is to make sure you are aware of the resource.

The Latter-Day Saint Family History Library contains the largest collection of genealogical information in the world. The library, originally founded by the Genealogical Society of Utah in 1894, is committed to capturing on film all worldwide data on public record such as deeds, wills, marriages, births and deaths. The LDS maintains the largest collection of genealogy archives in the world.

The Web Site. Visit the Family History Library Web site to get information about the library location and its history. You will find that this website has one of the richest set of online sources available anywhere.

<http://www.familysearch.org/>

Preparing for Your Visit. Locate the directions to the library, a layout of the library records, and information about hotel accommodations. (Click the "library" tab at the link above.)

The library is located at 35 North West Temple Street, Salt Lake City, Utah, United States. It will probably require a bit of planned travel so set a date for yourself (even if it's a year or more away) and start saving your pennies.

Note the library's hours. With the exception of Sundays and seven other days each year, the library is open from 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Mondays and from 7:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday.

The library is 142,000 square feet and covers 5 floors. You'll want to plan ahead.

LDS Orientation. Visit the orientation center upon entering the library. You be able to attend the short orientation session to become familiar with this sizable library. There are five floors, four of which are open to the public. Make sure you get a printed guidebook, which can help you use almost every system in the library.

You might want to check out the schedule of the various classes that are available throughout the day. They're free and given by volunteers and staff members to aid in your use of the databases and resource information. Plan your day around the classes. Like the orientation, these classes are extremely valuable.

Doing Research. Take advantage of the more than 70 computer research terminals available at the library. Use a stand-up computer for quick searches. (Use is limited to about 15 minutes; utilize a sit-down computer for up to one hour.) If they're all full, you'll find more computers one block away in the Joseph Smith Memorial Building. These off-site computers have access to the library indexes and are recommended for beginners. The LDS does not allow you to leave the library with the books you check out.

You can check out up to five films or five books at a time. Don't forget that these are available for use in the library only. You can take advantage of the assistants available on each floor. Don't let yourself get stuck for too long. Your visit is too costly and valuable to waste being lost. They are there to help patrons learn how to search, but not to find the information for you.

Print out information from a computer for about 5 cents per page, and make photocopies for about the same price. You can also get printouts of microfiche for 20 cents a page. If you want, you can also download data onto your own disks or purchase disks from the library. (Be prepared to wait in line to make copies.)

You'll want to plan to spend at least half a day getting oriented and another two days on research. Keep in mind that research can be quite exhausting. Plan ahead by creating a schedule for yourself.

REFERENCES

Go to <http://www.genealogybeginner.com/customers> for these and other links.

Websites:

- LDS Utah
<http://www.familysearch.org/>
- LDS Library Information
http://www.familysearch.org/Eng/Library/FHL/frameset_library.asp
- LDS Family History Library System
<http://genealogy.about.com/library/weekly/aa042400a.htm>

ACTION ITEMS

I won't try to task out everything involved in a trip to the LDS. I'll just provide some parting suggestions. If you've followed these chapters in order, then you'll have a wealth of things to research at the LDS.

What ever you do, don't start your genealogy adventure at the LDS. At the same time, don't consider yourself finished until you've visited at least once.

To Do:

Task 1: Learn as much as you can about the LDS before you consider or start planning a visit. Explore their website until you can visualize a plan. Don't start your search at the LDS. Wait until you have a good start and then go to the LDS to add to your progress.

Task 2: Plan ahead. Even if you plan a trip one or two years in the future. It may take time to get the resources to visit but it will be worth the trip. Give yourself at least three days once you get there.

Task 3: Spend your first day getting acquainted with the library, the resources, and the classes. Start off by getting a schedule of classes for the day and go (they're free!)

Task 4: Days two and three should be spent doing some hard core research. Don't waste your time being lost. The reference librarians at the LDS are among the best. Ask!

Final Comments

There you go. Bob's your uncle. I hope you've found this guide to be a motivational, no fluff, jumping off point to a life long adventure as an amateur genealogist.

Feedback

I'm always interested in hearing from you. Let me know what you liked and didn't like. Let me know how I can make the guide better. You can always email me directly at [cclegg \(at\) genealogybeginner.com](mailto:cclegg@genealogybeginner.com)

Quotes on Family

"If you cannot get rid of the family skeleton, you may as well make it dance."

» George Benard Shaw (1856-1950)

"Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a tribe, call it a family. Whatever you call it, whoever you are, you need one."

» Jane Howard

"The family is changing not disappearing. We have to broaden our understanding of it, look for the new metaphors."

» Mary Catherine Bateson

"Heirlooms we don't have in our family. But stories we've got."

» Rose Cherin

"Family isn't about whose blood you have. It's about who you care about."

» Trey Parker and Matt Stone

"In every dispute between parent and child, both cannot be right, but they may be, and usually are, both wrong. It is this situation which gives family life its peculiar hysterical charm."

» Isaac Rosenfield

"The family is the nucleus of civilization."

» William James Durant

"A family is a place where minds come in contact with one another. If these minds love one another the home will be as beautiful as a flower garden. But

if these minds get out of harmony with one another it is like a storm that plays havoc with the garden.”
» Buddha (563 BC to 483 BC)