

I N S I D E R

Family Tree Help! The Basics of Tracing Family Genealogy

LEARNING ABOUT YOUR ANCESTRY TO DISCOVER WHO
YOU ARE AND WHERE YOU CAME FROM

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Basics of Beginning Genealogy

Chapter 1

Delving into the past to discover our ancestors and the long hidden secrets that lie with them has become an increasingly popular pursuit during our era. You've probably thought about who or what some of your ancestors were, what they did for a living, where they lived etc. You never know who you might be related to. You could be a descendant of Braveheart, or even a cousin of Mel Gibson himself. Most likely you're not, but the possibility is there. Nevertheless, wouldn't you like to find out?

With the increasing availability of resources and information, now is a good time to begin a search of your family history. Knowing the history of your family - what trials they may have endured or hardships they've overcome, can help you to have a better understanding of yourself and a greater appreciation of your clan. Imagine discovering that

you're the great-great-great grandchild of a notorious highwayman. Now wouldn't that make for interesting dinner conversation!



Tip

ObituariesHelp has over 18 pages of free unique family tree templates. [Click here to view them.](#)

The pathway to the past however, is not paved with gold, though you might discover some along the way! It's often a rough and rocky journey through twists and turns and sometimes road blocks. The rewards that you'll receive along the way however are massive. You'll definitely learn to research, and you'll develop a detective like intelligence and keen intuition that enable you to tell the difference between a hot lead and a dead end. Long lost cousins are re-connected and far off family heirlooms are sometimes reclaimed.

As rewarding a journey as it may be, an expedition into your families past can be a complicated undertaking. This manual will help you from beginning to end. We'll show you how and where to start, what records and documents you'll need. When you discover those records and documents, you'll need to be able to understand and decipher them; we'll help you with that too. And most of all, we'll show you what to do if you come to the dreaded dead-end. Think of this manual as the genealogical shovel that will help you to dig up your ancestral roots!

The Family Tree and your Family History

Chapter 2

It's quite natural to wonder where you came from and to question who your ancestors might have been. Our ancestral lineage reaches back through the centuries and possibly across the seas and over continents. There is no doubt that our relatives participated in Women's Suffrage, the World Wars, and even the Industrial Revolution. The wonderful thing about a genealogical search is that it can reveal exactly what part, if any, our families played in those historical milestones. Perhaps it was a major one, perhaps a minor role. Whatever their involvement, the research we undertake will involve us personally in reliving those eras while discovering new and exciting facts about our family. But just how do we begin this epic adventure?



Like any worthwhile and labour intensive exercise, getting started is the hardest part of a genealogical search. But it's amazingly easy, and once you begin, the momentum you develop with the help of this manual will propel you onwards. The first step in beginning a family tree is to simply write down your name, your birth date and your place of birth on a sheet of paper. Voila, your genealogical search has begun! Wasn't that easy? I told you so! It's really that simple, but of course, it won't always be. You've written down facts about yourself that are common knowledge and easy to come by. In doing so you have begun compiling your family history.

Building a Family Tree and Recording a Family History is Not the Same Thing.

Though the two are interdependent, it's important to know the difference. While you can't build a family tree

without knowing some family history, certain details are not required for the family tree to grow. To establish a family tree, all the information you'll need are the names of the family members to be included in the tree, their birth dates and places, death dates and places and marriage dates and places if applicable. This is what you see commonly displayed in "tree" form and is also known as an Ancestral or Pedigree chart.

Though the construction of the Family Tree is an important aspect of genealogy, researching and recording your family history is genealogy. In compiling your family history, you're accumulating all the information you'll need to develop your family tree. You'll record all of this information in what is known as a family group record. This is your most important file in your genealogical search, and will contain all of the information you gather on every member of your family. Your family group record will be the basis of your genealogical search, and forming it is the best way to begin.

Beginning Your Family Group Record

Chapter 3

You've already written down your vital information, now it's time to begin with the rest of your family. This is a critical stage in searching your family history, and time spent here will benefit you further down the road. After your name, write down the basic information about them. Remember the basic information is what will be written onto the family tree and includes birth, death and marriage dates and their locations. I'll refer to them as the vital statistics for the duration of this manual. It will help to download a pedigree chart from our website and write in the names and information that you presently have. This will help you to see where there are gaps in your family tree and indicate where you need to focus.

At this initial stage you may not be able to proceed much farther than your grandparents, and you might realize how little you know about them. For instance you may not know your grandmother's maiden name, or birthdays may elude you. Don't despair; knowing exactly the extent and the limitations of your knowledge merely helps you to know precisely where you need to look. The way ahead will be much clearer.

The Next Step is Finding the Missing Information

This can be a long and enjoyable process and it's important to contain your excitement and complete this step thoroughly. You'll need to contact every family member that you can think of and gather as much memorabilia as possible. Ask and look for diaries, old bibles, newspaper cuttings, photographs, birth and death certificates, marriage certificates and any other documentation available. These things can be valuable assets to a genealogist, and it's important to store them securely within your family group record. Even if some of these things may seem useless at first, they may provide a valuable gem of information during the later stages of your search. If your relatives are generous enough to supply you with any photographs or documentation, make sure you scan or copy it as soon as possible and return it to them.

Interview Family Members

A large and often untapped source of family history within families is the knowledge and memories of the family members themselves. Ask questions of all of your relatives, especially older ones. What was Grandma Jones's maiden name, who was Uncle Harry? You'll be amazed how much of your family history is just lying dormant because no one ever asked about it. Before long you will have amassed a wealth of information, so make sure you record everything you learn. Take a small recording device along with you when you speak to your relatives as you most likely won't be able to remember everything. Most importantly, write everything down, you won't want to regret not having done so at a later date.

As you're interviewing your family members, make sure that you record all names and dates accurately. Misspellings or wrongly recorded dates can wreak havoc amongst other genealogists whose searches may bring them into contact with your family tree. On the other hand, if your information is written clearly and accurately those same fellow searchers could provide you with information that you may be lacking. Double check spellings and dates, and write addresses in as full a form as you have. Every detail is important in a genealogical search. In the case of names, make sure that you include nicknames and aliases.

Revealing Skeletons in the Closet

Exploring your family history through talking to and spending time with relatives has the added benefit of bringing families closer together. You'll probably spend time with relatives that you haven't seen for ages, or at least spend more time than you normally would with ones you are close to. It's amazing how quickly other members will get excited and involved in your search and dedicated their own time and resources to helping you. Keep in mind that some family secrets may be revealed that might shock or surprise you. Generally speaking though, most relatives are happy to participate in something that strengthens the family overall and empties the closet of any skeletons!

Because you may encounter a situation where your questions may lead to sensitive information a relative might not want to reveal, it's important to be tactful. Good preparation will usually ensure of this, so make note of anything you might want to ask and take those notes along with you. Ask yourself if your questions could lead to an uncomfortable or awkward situation and rephrase it if necessary.

History Comes Alive Through Your Ancestors

Besides forging new relationships with your living relatives, you'll begin to become acquainted with those who preceded you. The farther you go back into your family history, the more likely you are to discover individuals that were prominent in shaping the world of that time. People were much more involved socially and politically in times gone by, and the sheer mathematics of there being less people in the general population increases those odds. Your journey may take you to the Scottish Highlands, or the chambers of eighteenth century Bow Street. Wherever you travel to on your genealogical journey, you will not only learn about your family members, but their way of life, their social and political views. A search of your family history involves a search of history in general, the genealogist reaps many rewards.

Once you've exhausted your immediate resources and filled in all the information you can on the pedigree chart that you downloaded, it's time to start digging deeper into the past. Hopefully you have stored and logged all of the documentation photos and statistical information in your family group record. Keep in mind that the more you search, the larger that file will grow, so it will most likely be necessary to include subfolders within the main file. This can be done by generation or branch; you'll know the system that works best for you.

Which Way Do I Go?

Chapter 4

You'll come to a fork in the road immediately after beginning your family history search. This is simply because you have two parents. Your father's line of your family is known as the paternal side, your mother's the maternal. To keep things simple and focused it is best to attempt only one branch at a time. This will ensure that you stay on track, and by the time you've finished on one side of the family, you will have amassed a skill set and mastered techniques that will make searching the second branch much easier and faster.

Choosing the Path of Least Resistance

This will be the side of your family you know the most about just from your initial search. After sorting through all of the information that your family provided you with and filling it in on your pedigree chart, you should see on which side you are further along. Providing that your family have lived in the same country for several generations, or at least on the same continent, this could be the best route to go. However, there may be other factors to take into consideration. If researching the side you have the most information on would entail expensive travel costs or time off work, it may be more realistic to pursue the other branch.



Create a Balanced Family History

Of course you may have your own personal reasons for choosing a particular side to pursue. Perhaps one side of your family is more interesting to you or you believe it may contain a famous person from history. When making your decision, keep in mind that a family history search can take on a life of its own. You could easily find yourself going back hundreds of years through twelve or fifteen generations. If your purpose is to

locate a particular relative that you're interested in, then that is the route you must go. If however there is no pressing reason to follow a particular branch of your family to its end, then decide beforehand to search back a set amount of generations on each particular side before switching to the other. It's important not to develop a lopsided family tree that could cause hurt feelings among family members.

Once you've decided which side of the family you'll begin with, you're ready to begin the real work. Time to take on the tedious task of record searching!

Getting Ready For a Records Search

Chapter 5

The undertaking of a records search is no easy task, and it's best to prepare oneself mentally before diving in. You are going to encounter terminology that might not only be foreign to you, but actually written in a foreign language, even old English can be difficult to understand. Documents may be filled in incorrectly - as in my own great grandfather's death certificate (changed the name of the family on my paternal grandmother's side forever), or they may be unreadable when you do find them. There will be fees to pay and red tape to cut through, microfilm to be read and photographs to be scrutinised. There may be train or airline tickets to be purchased. Time and money are precious resources. A good way to be certain that you don't waste them is to ensure that the research you're about to do hasn't been done already.

Some of Your Genealogy Research May Have Already Been Done

You'd be amazed at how much research may have already been done on your family tree. I can attest to that personally. After posting a notice on a genealogy site that I was looking for information on relatives of my maternal grandmother, I received a message from someone who turned out to be my cousin. She had already traced the family tree on that side back to 1625! Imagine the time and resources that saved me. It probably deprived me of a bit of fun as well, but now the fun will be in the form of flying to meet my new-found cousins in England. I can also now concentrate my efforts and the resources that my cousin's research saved me on; either going even farther back on the maternal side of my family tree (or attempting to!), or beginning a trace on the paternal side. Either way I'm way ahead of the game.

I'm not saying this will happen to everyone, you may be the very first to begin investigating your family's past. But chances are that some information will have already been dug up, if not intentionally, then by another genealogist who's research of their own family line somehow crossed with that of yours. There is more than likely a genealogy society in your country. A simple Google search will reveal the closest one to you. An excellent place to start is World Vital Records which has access to birth, death, and marriage

certificates, as well as newspaper obituaries from around the world. The Family Search powered by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints is completely free and very thorough. Once you're sure that no other research has been done, or you have a point at which to start off from any that has been done, it's time to pursue that paper trail.

Full Speed Ahead!

Chapter 6

Once you've obtained as much background information as is available from within your family and any local sources, it's time to move farther afield. Official records provide fertile territory for discovering family facts and figures. As you go forward in your search, it's important to be fully equipped and thoroughly prepared for what can be an intense and addictive undertaking. The most important element of a record search is the recording and preservation of the information that you're going to uncover.

Preparing Your Family Group Sheet

Prepare your family group record to receive the data in an orderly fashion. Itemize everything, including individual members. The use of index cards to contain the vital statistics and other information about family members is a very effective method of record keeping. Within your family group record maintain files for documents, photographs and other important records like birth, death and marriage certificates.

Maintain separate folders for each branch within the family, one for your father's side the other for your mother's. How you organize beforehand will strongly influence the success, and the enjoyment level of your search.

Types of Records Vary Depending on the Year

Depending on which generation you are searching, the type of record or registry at your disposal will vary. The way information was recorded and databases kept have changed over the centuries. It can be very frustrating if you're looking for a particular type of registry and it didn't even exist in the time period you're focusing on. Popular information sources containing data from 1900 till present include birth registers, death registers, marriage registers and census reports. Besides providing exact information, these sources can give



you valuable leads that will help you to continue your search in other areas.

The Farther Back in Time You go, the More Obscure the Records Will Be

Nineteenth century records that you can search are land valuation reports and parish registers. Parish records will contain records of baptisms, marriages and burials that vary in the amount of information they provide, but have proven to be quite fruitful. Individual churches and religions may have their own membership records that may be useful as well. That of course necessitates you knowing which religion your ancestors belonged to. An often overlooked source of information is gravestones. They can provide an assortment of information, in some cases revealing names of earlier generations of relatives.

Beyond the nineteenth century there are miscellaneous records that you can consult. Military records such as those of the British Army can extend back to the early 1700's and constabulary or police records begin in the early nineteenth century. There are also some school records that date back as far as the mid 1800's and in some countries will contain particular insights into the students such as why they left and where they went. Ordnance surveys, maps and of course newspapers can reveal a wide variety of previously unknown information. Many of our relatives from preceding generations will have come from countries other than our own, so immigration records can be of immense value.

Types of Records Vary from Country to Country

The relative systems of record keeping you'll need to search will vary from country to country. Many of our ancestors will be from the UK or Ireland and other places in Europe. Our families also come from Africa and Asia, Canada or New Zealand, Australia and South America. The type of particular record or register you are searching for may have a different name in other cultures. For this reason, the break down of available data banks according to country or continent are located in separate PDF downloads.

Major Sources of Genealogical Records

Chapter 7

The most renowned census is that mentioned in the Book of Luke in the Bible: the emperor Augustus sent out a decree that everyone in his territory should be registered – the reason Joseph travelled with Mary to Nazareth. Census reports or population counts have been undertaken for centuries, and can be a goldmine for those searching their family history.

Your ancestors name and address is generally enough to get you going in your search of census records. The oldest known consistently taken census report is that of the United States which has been taken every ten years since 1790. Due to privacy issues, there is often restricted access to census reports. These protective seals can be anywhere from 70 – 100 years in length, and depending on which country's records you're searching you may not be able to access any records after 1930.



You will inevitably run into the problem of incomplete records due to the fact that some have been lost or destroyed over time. When you do find information on your ancestor it may contain:

- Their full name
- Names of family members
- Place of birth
- Parents place of birth
- Address
- Occupation
- Marriage status

Individual details in census reports will vary from country to country, but the information you find in them can be invaluable. You'll find that the older the census report, the less information it will contain, but when you do find it the reward is great!

Searching Census Reports Online

No longer do you have to visit the archives of many countries to access their census reports, you can do so online, but be aware that there is cost involved. Most of the census reports digitized and made available online have been done so by private companies who have invested a lot of time and money in doing so. They usually charge a subscription fee, but that could be cheaper than traveling abroad to delve through index upon index of musty old records or microfilm.

You'll usually need to register on the site, but generally they have other genealogy search tools and benefits which make joining them cost-effective. You'll need the name and address of your ancestor at least, but any other information you may have is useful in eliminating false matches, i.e. finding people of the same name who are not your relative.

What to Watch Out For

Remember that census reports may date back several hundred years. They didn't have the technology we do today, and most of the data was hand recorded, sometimes as the enumerator shared a glass of ale with his subjects! Don't assume everything is correct, but don't assume it's wrong either. Do record it exactly as you find it though, you can authenticate it later.

Civil Registrations - Births, Deaths and Marriages

Chapter 8

You might think that looking for your ancestor's birth certificate is the fastest way of finding them, but most often it is not. In fact, you would be better off looking for death or marriage certificates first; as these will give you added information in confirming your relative's identity. Birth certificates are also the most difficult to locate, especially before the beginning of the twentieth century, and failure to find one might lead to premature frustration for a beginning genealogist.

The greatest value of a birth certificate is not in the information it provides about that particular ancestor, but the details it gives of his or her parentage. Think about it, you already need to know your relatives name and place of birth to search for his certificate; the birth certificate is a link to the next generation. They are especially useful for learning the mother's maiden name.

How to Obtain Birth Certificates

Birth certificates are generally reliable as far as accuracy of information goes, but that data will vary according to geographical location and era. The further back in time you go, the less information you're likely to glean from a birth certificate. Many countries have restrictions in place to protect people's privacy which may make a birth certificate difficult to obtain in certain areas. Usually the more local your search, the more success you'll have. For instance; rather than search state records, undertake a local town or village search first.

Births were also recorded in registers, large volumes containing the names and birth dates of every person within a civil jurisdiction. You can search for birth registers in your local library to begin with, as occasionally they will have copies. If not, check with your municipal offices, and finally the national archives of the country you're searching.

Marriage Certificates and Registers

Marriage records are a highly rated find by genealogists. By providing the maiden name of the bride they open up another branch of the family tree, and so family historians spend extra time and effort trying to locate them.

Begin searching at home for marriage licences and certificates. They are often kept stored away with family photographs and such, so if someone in your family has a suitcase full of memorabilia; let that be the first place you look. Again, once you have exhausted your immediate resources at home and with your relatives, extend your search outward. Start first at local level, and then work your way towards a state or national search.

Census reports may reveal some information pertaining to marriages, but watch out for men marrying women of the same given name, this happened frequently in the past. Old newspapers, estate records, even probate records may contain information on marriages. As with any documents preceding the twentieth century, examine all of the information carefully. Compare the names on records with localities, birth dates and an other vital information you may possess to ensure that the person you have found is your ancestor and not someone else's of the same name.

Death Certificates and Registers

Death certificates sometimes contain very little information, but they can still be of value to the genealogist.

They'll usually contain:

- The person's age
- Place of Death
- Occupation
- Cause of Death
- Some other relative's name

Sometimes the ages were actually guessed in the past and may not be absolutely accurate. However, a death certificate can provide you with a place to start, as even an approximate age of death will narrow down the

time period in which to look for a birth certificate.

As in any records search, be wary of inaccurate information. Always try to authenticate or validate any data that you come across. Sometimes names are misspelt by those entering them; female informants sometimes gave their maiden name as opposed to their married name. Errors can be clerical or the result of faulty information given.

Church and Parish Records

Chapter 9

Before civil registration was introduced, most churches kept their own records. One such type of record was a membership list which kept the vital statistics of church goers. Other records that may contain information on your relative will be marriage and baptism registers. Baptism entries might contain the date of baptism, the baby's name, the father's name, the mother's maiden name and the names of one or two witnesses. Occasionally an address is given in a baptism certificate, but not always. Marriage entries likewise contain a wealth of material with names of the bride and groom, the names of their witnesses and the date of the marriage.

Although church and parish registers may provide you with needed information, they often vary from church to church or parish to parish as to how much info they provide. Keep in mind that these registers were also entered by hand, and often in Latin, so it could be difficult to capture anything of value off of them. Experience has shown that these records should be used as a guide, and one shouldn't consider them infallible. Needless to say, many genealogists have found valuable information in them, and for this reason they definitely should not be overlooked.

Where to Find Them

Some countries have microfilmed church and parish records and make them available to the general public through National libraries and archives. Your local library should be your first step, and there are church supported colleges who serve as repositories for their benefactor's records. Often your local church may still have paper copies, and this is especially true of Catholic churches.

Data from land records may also lead you to your ancestor's place of residence. Once you know where they lived, you can find out what churches were in the area during that time and consult their records if they still exist. If the former church has merged with a modern one of the same denomination you should be able to locate those records through a consultation with the local pastor or priest.

Other Records to Search

Chapter 10

Once you have checked the major recognized sources for information on your ancestor, here is a list of other miscellaneous sources you will want to consider.

Wills

The first thing to do after you have secured the date of death of an ancestor is to investigate as to whether or not they left a will. You may think that your relative may not have been wealthy enough to warrant them leaving one, but that is not always true. A large number of people did leave wills during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, even if they did not have much by our standards. It was quite a normal part of life during those times. Even if the ancestor you're currently searching did not leave one, they may have been mentioned in that of a great grandparent or other relative.



Wills provide detailed information and can provide a wealth of data regarding more than just one relative. They are considered a prized and fruitful source by genealogists, and rightfully so. They can illuminate the dynamics of inter-family relationships as well as reveal the economic or social standing of your relative. The fact that wills are both a legal and public document assures that the information provided in them will be true and accurate, important factors in successfully compiling your family history.

Usually apart from the name of the person making the will (testator), it will include the names of the executors and witnesses. During the nineteenth century, these people were usually all related, so you can imagine the progress you might be able to make upon locating an old family will. If you are unable to locate

a will probated or processed within the first year of your ancestor's death, don't despair. Longer periods are known to have passed before a will's authenticity was established, so a search of up to ten years after the person's death is recommended.

Married women rarely held property in their own right before the twentieth century, so few of them wrote wills. Many spinsters however did, and their last will and testament can be a rich source of genealogical material. In cases like these where there was no obvious heir, a vast number of relatives would be included in the distribution of the estate, and all would be named in the document. This may involve brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, cousins and godchildren, so you can imagine their worth.

Depending on the country wills or copies of them may be found in:

- Probate or Wills Calendars
- National Archives
- Probate Registries
- Family Records Centre – England and Wales
- National Libraries
- Church Court Records

Estate Records

In some countries Estate records were kept by wealthy landowners who recorded the property transactions between them and their tenants. If your ancestor was an estate owner or a tenant of one, there's a good chance you may find some of their details here. Estate records also may contain information about employees of the estate, so even if your ancestor wasn't a tenant of the estate, he may have been an employee of it. Due diligence is important when perusing these documents.

Estate records are only useful however if you know the estate your ancestor lived or worked on, or if there was an estate in the vicinity of the address you might have for them. These records often contained correspondence between the landlord and his agent, wage books, rent rolls and copies of leases. If your relative was in the area, there's a good chance of them being mentioned in the estate records.

Military Records

The military are known for their precision record keeping, and this is especially true of those of the larger countries like the United States and Britain. The British army has extensive records dating back to the early eighteenth century, while the US records date back to the Civil War. During the American Civil War soldiers' names were regularly recorded on muster rolls, and these records were subsequently indexed to determine a soldier's qualification for his pension. These records contain a soldier's name and rank at his time of enlistment and the rank he held on the termination of his service.

An often overlooked form of record is POW (prisoner of War) records. These are also maintained by most armies and other military branches. An especially resourceful organization is the Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System <http://www.itd.nps.gov/cwss/index.html> which contains records of over three million soldiers and US navy sailors and prisoner of war records.

British army records can be very forthcoming with information on your ancestor, but you will have to at least know the name of the regiment he served with. If you have this info and you can locate his army records, you will find out:

- His trade before enlistment
- His father's trade
- Age
- Physical statistics and description – height, weight, color of eyes etc.
- Military history – length of service, medals obtained
- Date and reason of discharge

As you can see, military records can provide you with the most detailed description of your ancestor that you're likely to find other than a photograph.

School Records

These are an under-used yet extremely useful source of genealogical data. School records have been kept by some schools for hundreds of years and contain as much data as census reports. If you are fortunate enough to come across a school register you can find:

- Students date of birth
- Age when schooling began
- Religion (can assist in searching parish or church registers)
- Occupations and addresses of parents
- Academic details

The value of school records lie not in only the information that they provide, but the priceless link they have with other documents. The pupil's age for example can lead you to a birth certificate, the naming of their religion to useful church records. You can find school records occasionally in genealogical and historical periodicals as well in school libraries, state and local historical societies, public libraries, and national archives.

Newspapers

The newspapers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries provide little in the way of genealogical help, with the most useful articles being those related to marriages and deaths. During this time period however, only the upper classes of society would have used this medium to make these types of announcement. Infant births were rarely mentioned because of high mortality rates, and if so rarely mentioned the mother or child by name. But if you're looking for eighteenth century information, the newspaper might be the only place you'll find it as civil registration had not yet begun.

By the nineteenth century though, more items of genealogical worth were included in newspapers. Though the poorest sections of society would not have used them, marriage, birth and death announcements became more common. Obituaries were introduced during this era, and even included people who died overseas. The value in newspapers from this time period is in the variety of information and articles they may have contained. Especially if your ancestor was a criminal, as crime cases were reported with great relish. A local newspaper report could be key in finding out more of your ancestor. For instance if you discovered that they

were a convict sent to Australia, your search would take on a completely new aspect.

Newspaper advertisements can also reveal things about your ancestor's business dealings. Notices of expansion, bankruptcies, job advertisements, and ownership changes can provide a profile of your relative. Popular in the nineteenth century was anything to do with emigration. Descriptions of overseas colonies and the people who inhabited them were featured along with letters from successful emigrants expounding the benefits of their new homelands. These can all provide vital clues to your past and should be carefully scrutinized.

Time to Build Your Family Tree

Chapter 11

You might want to consider researching and collecting your family history information as the “mining” of your data. Once you’ve exhausted the “mines”, you refine the raw material by authenticating and validating it. Now that your raw material has been refined, it’s ready to display it in a manner that will accent both its value and its character. The obvious way to do this is by now filling in a Family Tree chart, but there are many different types, and as many different ways to go about building them. Here we’ll discuss a few of the most popular methods of displaying your family tree.

GEDCOM Files

If you are thinking about displaying your family tree online on sites, you’ll need to have all of your information converted to the GEDCOM format.

GEDCOM is an acronym for GENEalogical Data COMMunication and is the standard format for exchanging information between various genealogical software programs. Don’t worry though, converting your files to GEDCOM format will not change their present format, it will simply create a different version of your original file that can be read by genealogical software programs. Different programs will require different procedures in the file conversion process, but most are straight forward and well explained. You will need genealogical software however to accomplish this.

Family Tree Software

There is a wealth of Family Tree building software available today, some online based, and others



downloadable. There are some such standard programs such as Legacy Family Tree and Personal Ancestral File from the Latter Day Saints which are free, but as in any free software programs features are limited, and you'll have to purchase a full version in order to maximize your benefits, The free versions are a good way for the beginner to get acquainted with genealogy software before investing their hard-earned money.

Downloadable Templates

A great way to get a little practice in building your family tree is to download one of our free printable blank Family Trees. These are usually only available on websites that require you to have a membership, but our quality templates are completely free to download. There are several variations of template available; I'll briefly explain the most popular types.

Tip

ObituariesHelp has each of these different types of family tree charts in three to ten generation examples. [Click here to view and download any of them for free.](#)

Circular Chart

The circular chart enables you to show the lines of parentage in your family history in a simple manner. Circular in form, of course, it begins with you in the middle, and subsequent generations extending outwards from the centre. A great benefit of the circular chart is that you can view your entire ancestral lineage in one glance, and being circular in form it takes up less space than other types.

Fan Chart

A fan chart consists of a circle in the middle which is enveloped by semi-circular partitions that extend out to either side, forming the shape of a Japanese style fan. Fan charts are a very decorative way to display your family history and also an efficient means. Each side of your family extends out in its own direction from the center, so it's very simple to locate a member of a particular branch.

Landscape Chart

Landscape charts will print out horizontally, increasing the amount of space you have to record your family history. The extra area gained by choosing a landscape style template will permit you to record your data a

little more clearly and legibly, making it easy for other genealogists to read. You never know when you might need their help, or when they might see something that will help them.

Bowtie Chart

The bowtie chart is another type that allows you to focus on a particular side of your family at a time. Many genealogists search their family history in this manner, as attempting to trace both sides at once can lead to confusion, chaos and finally discouragement. You'll also see progress a lot quicker by researching one branch of your family at a time, and Bowtie charts are excellent for this. The shape it takes is like that of a Bowtie, with you again in the centre and each branch of your family extending outwards from you.

Sharing Your Family Tree With Others

Chapter 12

One of the greatest rewards of a genealogical search is being able to sit down and share your family tree with others. They will be enthralled by your tales of research and captivated by the historical fascinations you've uncovered. Not to say the respect and amazement they'll show at how you were able to put it all together. But to do so effectively, you must have an organized and professional means of sharing your information.

Pedigree Charts

The main thrust of a genealogical search is to accumulate enough data on your ancestors so that you can place it in a pedigree chart. Pedigree charts are basically the Family Tree charts that we see connecting different generations of a family to each other. Pedigree charts usually show parental lineage, and are only one way of sharing your family history. It is the standard form for entering the vital statistics of your ancestors, i.e. – names, dates and places, but you'll uncover so much more facts about your relatives that there will not be room for on a pedigree chart. The following are other ways you can share your family history, separately, or in conjunction with your Pedigree chart.

Family Group Record

We discussed the Family Group record at the beginning of this booklet, but not only is it an excellent means of storing your ancestral data, it's a great way to share it as well. If you have indexed your family members individually on separate pages, you can go directly to any one ancestor to share stories or facts about them.

Your family group history binder should contain photos and copies of birth, marriage and death certificates and other documents that you can quickly access. People love to see old historical documents written in their calligraphic style, even if you can't understand what is written on them.

Family History Scrapbook

A scrapbook is really the perfect way for storing and sharing your family history. You can put everything in a scrapbook, from heirlooms to family photos, and we all know how much fun it is to view someone's scrapbook. Imagine one that extends back into history, from generation to generation, telling the story of your family history.

You can start a scrapbook very much as you would your family group record, or your pedigree chart – beginning with yourself. It could be a pictorial history, with text added to explain the pictures and documents interspersed amongst them, or it could be more textual, the choice is really a personal one. Photos are a big attraction of scrapbooks though, and one laced with old photos and ancient documents is sure to be a hit with family and friends.

You can also add lots of family mementos to your scrapbook, locks of babies' hair, family crests, and even old report cards and ancient letters with your ancestors signature can be laminated and displayed within. Have fun with creating your family history scrapbook, if it's fun for you to create, it will surely be fun for others to read.

Tips for Making Your Family Scrapbook

- 1. Organize everything first.** As you've collected information and family memorabilia during your search, hopefully you've stored it in an organized manner. If you have kept a family group history, you should have all of your photos sorted and separated by file dividers, so it should be easy to simply copy them and enter them into your scrapbook. I can't stress enough the importance of being organized from the beginning; if you are it will make your entire experience so much more pleasant.
- 2. Choose an appropriate sized scrapbook.** You will know how much documentation and other memorabilia you have collected during your search, and so should be aware of what size album or other styles of scrapbook you choose. If you have a large amount of information going back five generations or more, you might want to use the portfolio type that artists use to display their work. The pages in those are generally larger and can hold more information than the average photo album. The key is to choose

the right size, you don't want to have all of that wonderful information and not be able to display it.

- 3. Get yourself a set of decorative, colourful markers for adding text to photos and documents.** Use a ruler when writing in the text so that your scrapbook has a professional and impressive appearance.
- 4. Crop your Photos if you want.** Some of the older photos you find while searching your relatives may be a bit ragged and worn. While some people choose to keep them that way to preserve their authenticity, it's okay to crop them and make them neat if you like. The perfect compromise is to copy the original, then use a cropped copy in your scrapbook.
- 5. Arrange your pages first.** Make sure you lay your pages out first, much like a newspaper editor does. That way you'll make sure that you can fit everything you need to on a page, and if not, arrange it so that it sits well between two pages. Remember to leave room for any text you will write in.

Following these helpful hints should help you to create a family tree scrapbook that you and your entire family can enjoy. It's worth considering getting it professionally bound with your family pedigree chart or coat of arms emblazoned on the cover to give it the honourable appearance it deserves!