

Genealogy is recognized as the number one hobby in the United States! It's the one game that everyone can play—after all, we all have ancestors, and researching them is becoming easier every day. You'll soon discover how exciting and fun genealogy can be! So let's get started...

I – FIRST STEPS

- Begin by gathering all the information you can from family members who are still alive: parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.
- Get them to tell you all they know about your/their ancestors: dates of birth, marriage, death, educational background, occupation, etc. \Even if they're not sure, get it down on paper (we'll verify this information later).

II – RECORDING YOUR DATA

- Genealogical software – There are many fine genealogical programs available, most very reasonably priced. \ Two that are highly recommended (for PCs) are LEGACY (www.legacyfamilytree.com) first, download a free version—if you're happy with it, you can “unlock” the

deluxe version later for a small fee), and ROOTS MAGIC (www.rootsmagic.com).

- Other software is available for **Mac** (do a Google search for “genealogical software for mac”).

III – VERIFYING YOUR DATA

- Once you've downloaded your software and entered the information from your family members, the next step is to verify your data.
- The **Mormon Church** in Utah has the largest genealogical database in the world! And it's free! Their website is www.familysearch.org
- Another helpful website is that of the **New England Historic Genealogical Society** in Boston (NEHGS). Their website is www.americanancestors.org (this is free to members, but some of their databases are free to the public).
- Finally, you will want to go to **U.S. Census records**. Federal censuses started in 1790, and are generated every ten years. The 1890 Census records no longer exist (due to a fire), and the latest Census available to the public is the 1940 U.S. Census (by law, census information is sealed for 72 years). Federal census records are available online using Ancestry.com (free at

the public library), Heritage Quest (free, using your library card as password), and other websites.

- **State censuses** are often taken, usually in years ending in 5. Google your ancestors' state for details.
- Remember: Many public libraries have subscriptions to Ancestry, NEHGS, FindMyPast, etc.

IV – NEXT STEPS

- Don't overlook other sources of information about your ancestors, such as family Bibles, military service, land deeds, wills, college or business yearbooks, personal letters and diaries, etc. Often you'll find information in these sources not available elsewhere.
- Cemeteries are another source to consider. Many cemetery records are available online. Go to www.findagrave.com or <https://billiongraves.com> to start your cemetery search.
- Other unusual sources include the churches your ancestors attended, the companies they worked for, or societies they joined, including labor unions, societies, or farm co-ops, etc.

V – A FEW THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Always proceed from the known to the unknown—that is, go methodically from you to your parents, to your grandparents, to the next generation... Never skip a generation, nor jump to unwarranted assumptions.
- As you find information, be sure to keep a record of where you got it: who told you, what source you found the data in, what online website, etc. This is very important, because as you go further back, you will often find contradictory data, and knowing where you found the information will be crucial in deciding which information is accurate or not.
- Remember that prior to the 19th century, many of our ancestors were illiterate. The spelling of their names was not standardized until more recent generations. Be creative in your searching: try alternate spellings and nicknames (for example: Betsy or Lizzy for Elizabeth; Jerry or Gerry for Gerald or Girard, etc.).
- In many families, the same name was used for several generations (for example, John, father of John, with a grandson named John), or even at times for two siblings (when the first

died in infancy, before the second one was born). Sometimes names in foreign languages get translated (for example: a Frenchman named Boucher might become Butcher in America, or an Irish lass named Caitlin might be known in the U.S. as Cathleen, Kathleen, or Kate!)

- Finally, libraries have great how-to books for beginners, at 929.1.

VI – FINAL WORDS OF ADVICE

- Always look for original documents; don't accept online family trees without verifying the data; and remember—everything is not yet online!
- Along the way, you'll learn a lot about some of your own family customs, legends, and stories. You'll be enriched by all this, and will want to hand it on down to the next generation.
- Be sure to come to a meeting of the Shrewsbury Genealogy Club! We usually meet on the 4th Monday of each month, at 7pm. You'll get to discuss research problems, share tips, and generally talk with other people who happen to share your enthusiasm about genealogy!

GENEALOGY 101

Where and how to
start if you're
completely new to
genealogy research!

Prepared by the
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