

Basic Genealogy

1. Genealogy is the search for our ancestors. Family history is the study of the lives they led. Using the information from each area provides us with a true picture of our family.
2. Do your genealogy to learn about your family and your place in that family, to leave a legacy for your children and grandchildren and to research and trace our family's medical history.
3. Remember that each generation doubles the number of ancestors. It's easy to get lost if you don't plan ahead for your trip. Focus on one or two families. The others will still be there when you get to them.
4. Female lines are as important as male lines. One-half of your ancestors are female!
5. A generation is 22-25 years for a man and 18-23 years for a woman.
6. When taking notes, use standard size paper, one surname per page. Record the source and identifying information so you can find it again, and the date and place you found info (volume and page). Use only accepted abbreviations (no homespun stuff). Understand basic terminology.
7. Remember to document everything you find on your ancestors.
8. Meaningful genealogy requires thought. Develop a plan " "Why am I doing genealogy?" Set goals of what you plan to accomplish in a reasonable time frame, i.e., go back 4 generations, go back to the immigrant ancestor, do only my father's male line, etc.
9. Know your relationships: An ancestor is a person from whom you are descended. A descendant is a person who is descended from an ancestor. A relative is someone with whom you share a common ancestor but who is not in your direct line.
10. To find a birth date from a death date, subtract the age in years, months and days from the date of death. This is a very close approximation.

Census

1. When you're researching the census, be sure to look at 10 families before and 10 families after the family you are researching. These folks are most likely the friends (and family) of your ancestor. They lived in communities, not alone.
2. Begin with the latest census available and work backwards. U.S. Census records have been taken since 1790. Before 1790 you can use Tax Lists and other local lists that might have been compiled, according to the state you are researching in.
3. Don't assume that all children listed in the census belong to the wife listed. This may be a second wife and the children a combination of "his and hers."
4. A U.S. census is an official count of the population living in the United States on a designated day set at intervals. The census places an ancestor in a specific place at a specific time.
5. The U.S. census is taken every 10 years on a designated census day by an enumerator in a specific area called an enumeration district (E.D.). The first U.S. census was done in 1790; there are no U.S. censuses before 1790. The 1890 census was destroyed. Census information is kept confidential for 72 years after the census is taken.
6. In addition to the U.S. census population count, there are a number of special U.S. censuses: Slave, Industry & Manufacturing, Agriculture, Mortality, Social Statistics, Union Veteran and Widow, Defective, Dependent and Delinquent.
7. Prepare a census timeline before you begin. Review what you will find in the census you are searching. Work backwards from the most recent census. Expect spelling and age variations.
8. When copying census information, copy EVERYTHING EXACTLY AS IT IS WRITTEN! Do not change or update the information even if you think it is incorrect. This is the way it was written—leave it alone!
9. Soundex is a system of coding names for the census based on sound rather than alphabetical spelling. A variation called American Soundex was used in the 1930s for a retrospective analysis of the US censuses from 1890 through 1920. To save time, a free Soundex converter is available at www.rootsweb.ancestry.com.
10. When the head of the household is no longer listed, don't assume he/she is dead. It's possible that the former head of household is now living with one of the children.
11. A person may not have been living on the day the census was actually taken (not the official day). However, all information is to be "as of the official census day."

Charts & Forms

1. The Pedigree chart is the road map of you and your ancestors. It begins with YOU! Females must use their maiden names.
2. The Family Group Sheet identifies a couple and their children. Everyone has two group sheets - one as a child with parents and one as a parent with children.
3. A Chronological Profile begins with your ancestor's birth and is filled in with various occurrences in his life. Continue to fill this in as information becomes available to provide a picture of your ancestor's life.
4. The Research Log is very important for the time when you share your data or decide to publish your work. You will need to know your sources for obtaining each piece of information. Be VERY specific with your information quoting authors, titles, pages, publishers, etc.
5. Use a Correspondence Log! This includes the name and address of the person you have written to, what you requested, the date the request was sent and the outcome. Remembering every letter written is impossible. Follow up if you don't get an answer within a month.

Church Records

1. Church records may include births, christenings, marriages, deaths and burials. Be sure you have the correct church/religious denomination. If you're not sure, search the churches closest to home first and then broaden your search in ever-widening circles.
2. Check for cemetery records with the church, Sexton and Funeral Directors. Visit the cemetery and take a picture of the tombstone. Check the obituaries in that time frame.

Evidence

1. Direct evidence speaks to the point in question.
2. Indirect evidence gives facts from which you can come to a conclusion.
3. Primary evidence is personal testimony or a record created shortly after an event by a person with personal knowledge of the facts.
4. Secondary evidence is copied or compiled from other sources written from memory long after the event has occurred.

Hometown Records

1. City Directories provide names and occupations of town residents and much local business information.
2. It's very important to check maps. Boundaries change over time. Be sure the area where you think your ancestors resided is actually the area where they were.
3. Newspapers are wonderful Hometown Records. In addition to looking for obituaries, be sure to look for articles about special events... births, Baptisms/Christenings, weddings and pre-nuptial events (bridal showers, etc.), birthdays (parties), anniversaries, etc.
4. Town and county histories can be invaluable to form a picture of your ancestors in the time they lived in the area..

Immigration

1. Immigration is entering a country where you are not a native to take up permanent residence. Emigration is leaving a country where you have been a citizen.
2. Major ports of entry were Baltimore, Boston, New York, Philadelphia and New Orleans.

Internet Research

1. Join a Mailing List (www.rootsweb.ancestry.com). Be sure to subscribe in "digest" mode. E-mails about subjects on the list will come to your e-mail box.
2. Search the Message Boards for others looking for the same person(s) you're researching. You go to the Board to search but you can ask to be notified of new entries.

Interviewing Family & Friends

1. Be sure to make a list of all living relatives when you start your genealogy research. Interview every one of them. Be prepared with a list of questions. Use a tape recorder for the answers or take very good notes. Respect the person's privacy.
2. When writing to a relative for information, make specific requests. Don't ramble! Offer to share your information.

Land Records

1. There are various types of deeds to property. The most common are the warranty deed which transfers property with assurance of good title and the quitclaim deed which transfers one person's interest in the property without guarantee of good title.
2. When looking at deed indexes, be sure to look at both the "Grantor Index", an index to those selling the land and the "Grantee Index", an index to those buying the land.
3. STATE LAND STATES are states that owned and distributed their lands. This includes the original 13 colonies, Kentucky, Maine, Tennessee, Vermont and West Virginia, Hawaii and Texas. They use "metes and bounds" to survey the land.
4. FEDERAL LAND STATES were created from public domain, land the United States bought or acquired. The land was created into territories as the population spread out. Surveying is done according to the rectangular survey system.
5. Many legal instruments other than deeds appear in deed books. They include Bills of Sale, Prenuptial Agreements, Powers of Attorney, Contracts, Affidavits, Wills and Inventories and Voter and Jury Lists.

Naturalization

1. Naturalization is the process of becoming a citizen. It is a two step process and takes about five years. The Declaration of Intent or 1st papers can be filed after two years of residency. Naturalization and the Oath of Allegiance are taken after an additional three years of residency.

Organization

1. Organize from the beginning in a system that suits your needs, but in which you can quickly and easily find information when you want it.
2. Set up "proof files." These are your original documents and NEVER travel with you.
3. "Portable files" are copies of your original documents and your family group sheets, notes, pedigree charts, chronological profiles, etc.

Probate Records

1. Probate records refer to wills, inventories, letters of administration and guardianship. They are usually held at the county courthouse unless archived and they are indexed by the name of the testator.
2. There are three types of wills: Attested, Holographic and Nuncupative. The attested will is the most common and is prepared for the testator. A holographic will is written by the testator himself. A nuncupative will is the deathbed wishes of the testator, recorded by a witness present at the bedside. All wills must be witnessed.
3. A person who dies "intestate" dies without a will.
4. An "executor" is named by the testator and is required by the court to post a bond. An "administrator" is appointed to handle the affairs of one who dies intestate (without a will).

Surnames

1. Surname Sources - Know the naming patterns of the ethnic area you are researching is an invaluable resource in recognizing family names. Surnames began in Europe about the 11th century. They developed as trade increased. The four basic groups of surnames are the patronymic (based on the father's name), landscape features or place names, action or nicknames, and occupational or office names.
2. When it comes to spelling variations, think "out of the box." Often clerks and government officials were unable to correctly record the names given them by unschooled immigrants not familiar with the English, French, German or Spanish languages used in the port of entry and part

of the country where they settled. It was written down as they heard it and the immigrant accepted this as the official American rendering of his name.

Vital Records

1. Vital Records include birth, marriage, divorce and death records.
2. Death Records can be the least accurate records depending upon the knowledge of the person reporting the information about the deceased.. Unfortunately, you will never be able to report your own information. How much do your children know about you?
3. Marriage Records may only be records of the wedding. However, you may also find the Application for Marriage completed by the bride and groom-to-be. Marriage records may also be corroborated with church records. Check everything for correctness.
4. Birth Records are difficult to obtain because they can be used for so many purposes. You may be required to provide proof of relationship and proof of the person's death.
5. Vital records and event information are more reliable when they are recorded near the time of the happening. The longer the time from the event occurrence that the record is made, the less accurate it may be based on the memory of the person involved.

Tax

1. Genealogical Benefits of Tax Records For genealogists, tax records can help solve a multitude of genealogical problems, especially for tracing ancestors prior to the 1850 census. Clues may lead to the birth, marriage or death year of your early ancestor when no other record may have survived. Taxes were collected annually. Tax records came in many forms. Poll or head taxes which were levied upon a person, real property taxes which were levied upon a person's land, and personal property or income tax. These can be recorded separately but may have been combined into one record with various columns representing each property type. In some early colonial areas, quit-rents were collected. The rents, a remnant of the old feudal system in Europe, were collected by the government or by large land owners annually on small parcels sold to private citizens. The Federal Government levied taxes upon citizens usually to help defray the cost of a war or pending war. Federal records are usually indexed. Researchers can usually locate tax lists in print and indexed for the years 1798, 1814-1816, and 1862-1866 for any given county. The same would also apply to many state and some local jurisdictions. Local laws governing who was taxable and who was exempt changed from time to time and for various reasons. A poll tax levied to raise money for a new courthouse may include persons over the age of sixteen, and a property assessment the same year may only include citizens age twenty-one and above. Tax records can be used to determine parentage. When an ancestor has been tracked in the tax records for a series of years and suddenly a male with the same surname appears on the lists next to him, he is more than likely a son who is now of legal or taxable age. The legal age for owning land was 21 years which would explain a male who suddenly appears on the same assessment roll as your ancestor. Some counties created a separate list for unmarried men often labeled single men or single freemen which meant they were not indentured to any individual. A young man coming of legal age would be taxed on his personal property--usually a horse or a cow. Once married, his name would leave the single freeman list and suddenly appear on the regular list with other heads of families. You can determine the year your ancestor arrived and left the jurisdiction by his first and last appearance on a tax record. If the assessment shows enough detail, a match can be made across county and even state lines. Look for a matching occupation, livestock, or any unusual taxable items that would have been transported. Always use a series of years and always look in every township in the county. Like counties, townships were also divided. Many tax records list occupation as a category, and those that don't will often include the occupation to avoid confusion between two individuals with the same name. A father may have passed his trade on to son. Tax records issued for licenses and permits will be listed under occupations or business and commerce. Upon his death, a man will disappear from the tax lists, but often the death is confirmed when his estate is still taxed awaiting probate. If you are lucky enough to find an entry listing the estate of your ancestor you can determine the year of his death. Make sure to look at a number of consecutive years because the deceased may be taxed for several years until his estate is probated. Always check the end of each tax list as your ancestor may have been late or delinquent in paying or have un-resolved issues. Sometimes there will be two lists for each year: the local list and the list sent to the county. Check both because your ancestor may have been accidentally omitted from one. Tax records and indexes are become increasingly available online through Family Search and Ancestry thanks to the efforts of the Family History Library. They can also be accessed at the county courthouse, the county historical society, the state archives, the National Archives, in published county histories, journals and periodicals.