

# Ultimate Beginners Guide to Genealogy

By Marc McDermott

*Getting Started with Genealogy – Everything You Need to Know*

If the word “genealogy” brings to mind tedious searches through dusty shelves and boxes to eke out yet another tiny fact about a distant ancestor who died long before you were born, you’re right. But you’re also completely wrong.

There is so much more to genealogy than just putting together a list of names, places, and dates. Genealogy is all about understanding the history of your family. It’s about where your ancestors came from, how their world affected who they were, how they lived, and eventually, how they came to have children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren, all the way to down to you.

People get started with genealogy for a variety of reasons:

- to learn more about their family culture and heritage
- to add a sense of history and tradition to their lives
- to make sense of all the “cousins” they have met and figure out how they fit together
- to find out whether that story that Grandpa Adams used to tell about being descended from President John Adams is really true
- to leave a personal history behind for their children and grandchildren
- and countless more

Whatever your reason for considering genealogy, this guide is designed to help you take that first plunge. While this guide is specifically about genealogical research in the United States, most of the same rules apply no matter what countries you are researching.

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### **What is genealogy and why should you do it?**

Genealogy is the study of our ancestors: our parents, their parents, and on and on. But not only are we looking for a list of names and dates, we're also looking for their stories and how they fit into history.

Genealogy is a lot like putting together a jigsaw puzzle, but without the photo on the box and with some of the pieces missing. It's challenging, but when you finally sit back and see the picture come together, it's incredibly satisfying and rewarding.

### **Genealogy vs. family history**

Some people will tell you genealogy and family history are the same thing. Others say they are entirely different. The truth lies somewhere in the middle. Genealogy focuses on finding all of your ancestors, tracing every line back as far as you can, and gathering documents to prove those relationships.

Family history is more about tracing a single line or two, and focuses on creating an in-depth story of that family line as it moves through time and history.

Both genealogy and family history rely on the same records and the same research methods. The only real difference is whether you want to know a little bit about a lot of people (genealogy) or a lot about a few people (family history).

### **Why you absolutely have to start today**

When I was 13 years old, all four of my grandparents and five of my great-grandparents were still alive. By the time I was 23, every one of them was gone, together with their stories and memories. The longer you wait, the more will be lost. Records get destroyed, on purpose or accidentally; people pass away.

Too many people wait until they are retired, their children are grown, and they finally have free time, but that's far too late. Don't wait, get started today!

## **4 Tips for Getting Started**

### **1. Organize Your Findings**

Ready to jump right in? That's great, but there's something you should do before hitting the library or jumping online. You need to decide how you're going to organize what you find. There are some ways you can do that, and none are perfect for everyone, so pick the one you think will work best for you.

#### **On Paper**

Regardless of what else you do, you should have a way to file physical documents. Even if you plan to put everything on the computer, paper makes a great, durable backup, and can be great for organizing your thoughts, too. Your best bet for paper records are file folders and somewhere to store them, like a file cabinet or storage box. Use one folder for each surname you are researching. If you have a lot of information about a specific person or family, make a new folder just for them, too.

#### **On the Computer**

There are a variety of computer programs you can use to organize your genealogy, too. They range from free to rather expensive. [See our guide here](#). In general, the more a program costs, the more features it has. But for the beginner genealogist, more features isn't always better. Pick a less complicated program to start. You can always export your family tree from one program to another later.

Some websites, such as [Ancestry.com](#) and [FamilySearch.org](#), allow you to build your family tree online and skip the software altogether. Just be aware that if you use a subscription website to organize your data, you may need to keep paying every month instead of just once for software.

Probably the most popular genealogy program is [Family Tree Maker](#). It offers every feature you will need without going overboard, and there are how-to guides for it everywhere on the web. This software is now owned by mackiev.com. Family Tree Maker retails for about \$80, but chances are you're never going to need anything it doesn't offer.

### **2. Always Use Birth Names**

Whether you're working on paper or a computer, one essential rule is to always use maiden names or birth names. A woman's surname may change two or three (or more!) times in her life, and you don't want to have records lurking under several names. Always use the surname she had at birth. Likewise, if you have a child who is adopted, it is usually best to use his or her birth surname, too, if known.

### **3. Start with the Census**

Many folks just starting out in genealogy start with census records, and for good reason. Most census records are now digitized, searchable, easy to access online, and full of great information to start building your family tree.

### **4. Don't Forget the Bigger Historical Picture**

Your life is a reflection of the world around you, and the same is true for your ancestors. When it comes to genealogy, you cannot ignore the world that your ancestors lived in, either. When your ancestors came to the United States, what was happening in the country where they lived before? Was there a war, civil unrest, famine, religious persecution? Why did your ancestors settle where they did? Why did they move when they did? All of these questions not only impact how and where you go about searching, but they also add historical context and interest to your family's history.

For example:

- many families relocated in the 1930s as a result of the Great Depression, looking for new opportunities
- the U.S. government has issued land grants several times to encourage settlement of the “wild frontier”
- the Irish Potato Famine in 1845-1852 caused thousands of people to emigrate

I even have one ancestor who settled where he did because he hurt his leg and couldn't walk any further. Understanding the world in which your ancestors lived is vital to understanding who they were, and making their lives truly come to life.

## Common Records, What They Tell You, and Where to Find Them

There are more than a dozen kinds of records commonly used in genealogy (and many uncommon ones, too). Each type of record will be good for certain types of information, but less useful for others, so it is important that you know about all of them. Many of these records can now be found online (check out the website list later in this guide), but for some, you still need to go to the source, whether it be a courthouse, a church, a library, or wherever.

## Census Records

## What Is the U.S. Census?

When we talk about the census, most of the time we're talking about the Population Schedule of the U.S. Census. This census has been taken every ten years since 1790, and most of the records still exist today (unfortunately, most of the 1890 census was lost in a fire).

While other components of the census sometimes exist, such as an Agricultural Schedule or Manufacturing Schedule, most of the time the Population Schedule provides the greatest amount of information for genealogists and family historians.

## Information Available from the Census

From 1790 to 1840, census takers listed the name of the head of each household, together with the number of people living in each household divided into age ranges and by sex.

[illegible]

*1840 US census.*

Unfortunately, that means that these records may be of limited use in tracing family lines, as there is no way to connect children with parents or even husbands with wives. Still, these years can help you track your ancestors' movements over time, and may give clues on where to search for other, more detailed records.

Beginning in 1850, the census lists every single person in each household, including

valuable information such as place of birth and age. Later records list actual month and year of birth, or even exact date of birth, depending on the census.

## 1860 U.S census

They may also list occupations, places of work, income, the value of real and personal property, education level, and more. In general, the later the census, the more information it includes. But any census from 1850 on can be a very helpful resource in linking parents with children and trace elusive ancestors through their brothers and sisters.

## How Information Was Gathered

One of the most important considerations in using census records is understanding how the information was gathered. *The Theory*: during a certain range of days, a census taker visited every single house or another dwelling within his territory, spoke with the people living in each, explained what information was needed, and carefully gathered and recorded it.

## The Reality:

although the vast majority of the information on the census is accurate (or very close) there are several reasons why a particular record might not be. One of the most common reasons was that no one was home. If the residents weren't home, rather than having to circle back—and keep in mind most years of the available census, people traveled on foot—the census taker likely got the information from the next door neighbors.

Beginning with the 1940 census, the census takers were finally instructed to indicate who provided the information (with a plus sign inside a circle), but that doesn't help in any of the years before that.

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SCHEDULE 1.—Free Inhabitants in Washington Sp. in the County of Blackford State of Indiana enumerated by me, on the 28 day of June 1860. Geo. E. Howdell Marshal.

Post Office Dundee

1	2	3	4			7	8		10	11	12	13	14
			5	6	Value of Real Estate		Value of Personal Estate						
363	353	David McLeamy	43	M		Farmer	3000	760	Ohio				
		Eliza	43	F					Ohio				
		Abner	16	M					Ind.				
		Newton	13	M									
		Andrew J.	11	M									
		Mary H.	8	F									
364	354	Henry Beckhiser	25	M			1500	200	Ohio				
		Sarah	24	F					Ohio				
		Ernest	5	M									
		Mrs. A.	3	M									
		Olive J.	1	F									
365	355	John Sci	42	M		Blacksmith	150	215	Penn.				
		Rebecca	40	F					Ind.				
		Rey.	13	M					Ind.				
		Mary	11	F									
		Franklin	9	M									
		George	6	M									
366	356	William A. Patton	26	M		Trader		450	Ohio				
		Mary A.	19	F									
367		Unoccupied											
368	357	Nathan Henderson	33	M		Farmer	400	250	Ohio				
		Elizabeth	31	F									
		Sarah M.	9	F									
		Elijah P.	7	M									
		William M.	5	M									
		Rebecca	2	F									
369	358	Mrs. F. Frazer	32	M			250	300	Ohio				
		Loth.	30	F									
		James T.	8	M									
		Francis M.	1	M									
370		Unoccupied											
371	359	Mathias Roll	35	M					Ohio				
		Emily	39	F					Ind.				
		James M.	14	M									
		Sarah E.	11	F									
		Beck	9	M									
		Ward	7	M									
		Edmund	4	M									
372	360	Reuben Storms	47	M			2000	300	Ohio				
		Orville	44	F									

No. white males, 24 No. colored males, No. foreign born, No. blind, No. white females, 14 No. colored females, No. deaf and dumb, No. insane, 7800 2475 No. paupers, No. married,

Line No.	LOCATION		HOUSEHOLD DATA				NAME	RELATION	PERSONAL DESCRIPTION				EDUCATION	PLACE OF BIRTH		CITIZENSHIP		
	Street, care of, mail, etc.	House number in case not known	Number of household in order of consanguinity	Married (0 - married, 1 - single)	Value of house, if owned, or monthly rent, if rented	Does this household live on a farm? (Yes or No)	Name of each person whose usual place of residence on April 1, 1940, was in this household.  BE SURE TO INCLUDE: 1. Persons temporarily absent from household. Write "Ab" after names of such persons. 2. Children under 1 year of age. Write "Infant" if child has not been given a first name. Enter X after names of persons furnishing information.	Relationship of this person to the head of the household, as wife, daughter, father, mother-in-law, grand-son, lodger, lodger's wife, servant, hired hand, etc.	Sex-Male (M), Female (F)	Color or race	Age at last birthday	Height in inches (18)	Weight in pounds (140)	Education (18)	If born in the United States, give State, Territory, or possession.  If foreign born, give country in which birthplace was situated on January 1, 1887.  Distinguish Canada-Frontier from Canada-English and Irish Free State (Give from Northern Ireland).		CODE (Leave blank)	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17		
1	5758		Cont	No			Mengel, Hagethrim	Wife	1	F	W	30	M	160	4	10	Iowa	65
2				No			Warren	Son	2	M	W	6	S	Y	1	1	Missouri	63
3	5759	71	R	3	0	No	Phelps Rhinels	Head	0	M	W	68	M	160	8	8	Missouri	66
4				No			Lillian M	Wife	1	F	W	48	M	160	4	4	Arkansas	84
5				No			Aranda	Daughter	1	M	W	24	S	120	4	3	Missouri	65
6	802	92	R	3	0	No	Walton Charles W	Head	0	M	W	66	M	160	4	3	Missouri	66
7				No			Emma F	Wife	1	F	W	39	M	120	4	3	Missouri	66
8	804	43	0	1400	0	No	Molter, Mary	Head	0	F	W	37	M	120	4	3	Maine	50
9				No			Artemis Jr	Son	2	M	W	23	M	160	4	3	Ohio	58
10				No			Mary R	Daughter	5	M	W	19	M	160	4	3	Kansas	70
11				No			Jeannette	Daughter	2	M	W	20	S	120	4	3	Illinois	61
12	806	94	R	1	0	No	Schoeller Charles A	Head	0	M	W	30	M	160	8	8	Missouri	66
13				No			Irene	Wife	1	F	W	45	M	160	8	8	Illinois	61
14				No			Michael	Daughter	2	F	W	25	S	120	4	3	Missouri	66
15	806	95	R	1	0	No	Whitby John	Head	0	M	W	40	M	160	4	3	Austria	15
16				No			Geraldine	Daughter	2	F	W	14	S	40	4	9	Illinois	61
17				No			Alis	Daughter	2	F	W	13	S	40	4	8	Illinois	61
18	808	96	R	1	0	No	Kanon, Leslie	Head	0	M	W	33	M	160	4	3	Minnesota	64
19				No			Blaughe	Wife	1	F	W	24	M	160	4	3	Colorado	91
20				No			Phyllis	Daughter	2	F	W	3	S	120			California	98
21	808	97	R	1	0	No	Vatne Albert	Head	0	M	W	49	M	160	8	8	Norway	65

1940 U.S census

Even if someone was home, they might not have understood all the questions, they might not have remembered their children's exact ages (or even their own), they might not have spoken English well (or at all), and they might have been entirely illiterate, which led to some very interesting and creative spellings of names. And of course, it doesn't matter how correct the information is if the census taker's handwriting is illegible.

RESIDENCE, APRIL 1, 1935				
<p>IN WHAT PLACE DID THIS PERSON LIVE ON APRIL 1, 1935?</p> <p>For a person who, on April 1, 1935, was living in the same house as at present, enter in Col. 17 "Same house," and for one living in a different house but in the same city or town, enter, "Same place," leaving Cols. 18, 19, and 20 blank, in both instances.</p> <p>For a person who lived in a different place, enter city or town, county, and State, as directed in the Instructions. (Enter actual place of residence, which may differ from mail address.)</p>				
City, town, or village having 2,500 or more inhabitants. Enter "R" for all other places.	COUNTY	STATE (or Territory or foreign country)	On a farm? (Yes or No)	CODE (Leave blank)

Fortunately, even if not exact, in most cases the information is close, and may provide the clues needed to lead you to more accurate and thorough records. Just try not to be frustrated when your ancestor John appears as Johnny, age 5, in 1850; Jon B., age 14, in 1860; and J. D., age 26, in 1870.

1940 U.S census residence section

## **Census Date**

One thing to keep in mind is the date that the census was taken. Historically, census information was collected over a period of a month or more, but every census year had a specific date (such as April 1), and all information was supposed to be based on that date.

So if Susan turned 13 on April 5, and the census date was April 1, she should still be listed as age 12 on the census, even if the census taker didn't arrive until after her birthday. If someone in the household was alive on April 1 but had passed away by the time the census taker arrived, they should still be listed on the census.

In reality though, things did not always work out that way. Susan was listed as age 13, and the deceased was nowhere to be found on the census. To make matters worse, the official census date has not stayed the same. From 1830 to 1900, the date was June 1 (actually June 2 in 1890, because June 1 was a Sunday). But in 1910, the date was moved to April 15. In 1920, it was moved to January 1. In 1930, it was changed to April 1. Be aware of the official census date and how it might affect your search.

## **Places Change**

From one census to the next, your ancestors could be living in a new township, a new city, a new county, or even a new state, all without moving an inch! That's because places change over time. A town may adopt a new name. A county might be split in two. New states were being formed even into the 1950s.

You need to be aware of this and may need to do a little research to find out what a location was called in a certain year. For example, searching for your ancestors in Snyder County, Pennsylvania in 1850 is guaranteed to turn up zero results, because Snyder County was not formed until 1855. You need to be searching in Union County instead.

## **Searching with Soundex**

It is very easy to misspell names, especially if the person saying it is illiterate and can't spell it for you. And for much of U.S. history covered by the census, many Americans were illiterate. Foreign names and those spoken with a heavy accent were also often misspelled. So if you're looking for an ancestor with the surname Donovan, how can you possibly search for it on the census if it might have gotten spelled Donavan, Dunavan, Dunovan, Donnovan, or any of a dozen other ways?

Soundex is a special system that was set up to help you do just that by organizing similar sounding names together (such as Smith and Smythe). In the 1930s, Soundex indexes were created for the 1890 to 1920 census schedules, and have since been created for many other records, too.

Some genealogy websites such as Ancestry.com even include an advanced search option to use Soundex when searching any of their records. Soundex uses a letter (the first letter of the last name) and three numbers representing additional consonants, if any, to group the names (Smith, for example, becomes S530; Washington would be W252). It lumps similar sounding consonants together (like d and t, or m and n) to make it easier to catch spelling mistakes. Many times, this can help you find missing ancestors, especially if their names were misspelled on the census or other records.

However, the more unique your ancestor's surname, the less useful the Soundex might be. Galloway and Galey, for example, both share the same Soundex code, G400, but there are many, many more Galloways than Galeys. We'll go into more detail on using Soundex (and the related Miracode) in another article.

Quick Tip: in some census years, a few people on each page were chosen to provide extra information - be sure to check the bottom of the census sheet, and you might get lucky.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS	
For Persons Enumerated on Lines 14 and 29	
Line No.	NAME
	35
14	
29	

1940 U.S census. Whoever was listed on lines 14 and 29 were required to give additional information

### Is it Worth It?

Given all the problems of finding specific census records and considering that the information may not be correct, is it even worth using them at all? Absolutely, without question, yes. While the census may have its issues, it is very easy to search.

Every available page of every year has been digitized, indexed, and put online by sites such as Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.org, making them accessible from nearly anywhere, often for free. Census records are one of the few good sources for locating and tracing

parents, siblings, and families across generations.

They provide excellent clues about not only places and dates of birth, but tell you exactly which counties you should be searching for wills, probate records, birth, marriage, and death records, church records, and so much more. The census isn't going to give you everything you want to know about your ancestors, but it is a fast, easy, and inexpensive way to get started.

**Other Common Records** Here's a quick rundown on the other types of records used most often in genealogy.

STATE OF HAWAII		CERTIFICATE OF LIVE BIRTH		DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH	
		FILE NUMBER 151		61 10641	
1a. Child's First Name (Type or print)	1b. Middle Name	1c. Last Name			
BARACK	HUSSEIN	OBAMA, II			
2. Sex Male	3. This Birth Single <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Twin <input type="checkbox"/> Triplet <input type="checkbox"/>	4. If Twin or Triplet, Was Child Born 1st <input type="checkbox"/> 2nd <input type="checkbox"/> 3rd <input type="checkbox"/>	5a. Birth Date August 4, 1961	5b. Hour 7:24 P.M.	
6a. Place of Birth: City, Town or Rural Location Honolulu			6b. Island Oahu		
6c. Name of Hospital or Institution (If not in hospital or institution, give street address) Kapiolani Maternity & Gynecological Hospital			6d. Is Place of Birth Inside City or Town Limits? Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>		
7a. Usual Residence of Mother: City, Town or Rural Location Honolulu		7b. Island Oahu	7c. County and State or Foreign Country Honolulu, Hawaii		
7d. Street Address 6085 Kalaniana'ole Highway		7e. Is Residence Inside City or Town Limits? Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>			
7f. Mother's Mailing Address		7g. Is Residence on a Farm or Plantation? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
8. Full Name of Father BARACK HUSSEIN OBAMA			9. Race of Father African		
10. Age of Father 25	11. Birthplace (Island, State or Foreign Country) Kenya, East Africa	12a. Usual Occupation Student	12b. Kind of Business or Industry University		
13. Full Maiden Name of Mother STANLEY ANN DUNHAM			14. Race of Mother Caucasian		
15. Age of Mother 18	16. Birthplace (Island, State or Foreign Country) Wichita, Kansas	17a. Type of Occupation Outside Home During Pregnancy None	17b. Date Last Worked		
18a. Signature of Parent or Other Informant <i>Stanley Dunham Obama</i>		18b. Date of Signature 8-7-61			
19a. Signature of Attendant <i>David A. Similan</i>		19b. Date of Signature 8-8-61			
20. Date Accepted by Local Reg. AUG - 8 1961		22. Date Accepted by Reg. General AUG - 8 1961			
23. Evidence for Delayed Filing or Alteration					

### Birth Certificates

Birth certificates can tell you not only when someone was born but where, and give important details about the child's parents, often including when and where they were born, too.

#### *Birth certificate for President Obama*

Some states have them online, others you may have to request by mail. Before around 1900, many birth records were kept by counties rather than the state. Information may be incomplete, or they may not exist at all.

Form No. 10

**CERTIFICATE OF DEATH**  
STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA  
Bureau of Vital Statistics  
State Board of Health

1. PLACE OF DEATH  
County of Charleston  
Township of .....  
or  
Inc. Town of .....  
or  
City of Charleston Registration District No. 9A  
(No. 73 Ashley Ave.)

File No.—For State Registrar Only.  
**21275**

Registered No. 15351  
(For use of Local Registrar)  
(If death occurred in a Hospital or Institution give its NAME instead of street and number.)

2. FULL NAME Thomas L. Delahunty  
Residence In City ..... Yrs. .... Mos. .... Days.

**PERSONAL AND STATISTICAL PARTICULARS**

3 SEX Male 4 COLOR OR RACE white 5 SINGLE, MARRIED, WIDOWED, OR DIVORCED Widowed  
(Write the word)

6 DATE OF BIRTH ..... 1919  
(Month) (Day) (Year)

7 AGE 51 yrs. .... mos. .... dys. If LESS than 1 day, .... hrs. or .... min.

8 OCCUPATION  
(a) Trade, profession, or particular kind of work Marine Engineer  
(b) General nature of industry, business, or establishment in which employed (or employer) .....

9 BIRTHPLACE (State or Country) Charleston

**PARENTS**

10 NAME OF FATHER Thomas Delahunty  
11 BIRTHPLACE OF FATHER (State or Country) Ireland  
12 MAIDEN NAME OF MOTHER Bridget Conlon  
13 BIRTHPLACE OF MOTHER (State or Country) Ireland

14 THE ABOVE IS TRUE TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE  
(Informant) Miss Delahunty  
(Address) 73 Ashley Ave.

15 12/18/19 LOCAL REGISTRAR

**MEDICAL CERTIFICATE OF DEATH**

16 DATE OF DEATH December 14, 1919  
(Month) (Day) (Year)

17 I HEREBY CERTIFY, That I attended deceased from ..... 191..... to ..... 191....., that I last saw h..... alive on ..... 191....., and that death occurred, on the date stated above, at 11.30 P m. The CAUSE OF DEATH\* was as follows: .....

Val Disease of heart

(Duration) ..... yrs. .... mos. .... days

Contributory (SECONDARY) .....

(Signed) John G Mansfield Dec 18 1919 (Address) Palmetto St

\*State the Disease Causing Death, or, in deaths from Violent Causes state (1) Means of Injury; and (2) whether Accidental, Suicidal or Homicidal.

18 LENGTH OF RESIDENCE (For Hospitals, Institutions, Transients, or recent Residents)  
At place of death ..... yrs. .... mos. .... dys. In the State ..... yrs. .... mos. .... dys.  
Where was disease contracted, .....

If not at place of death? .....

Former or usual Residence New York City

19 Place of Burial or Removal St. Lawrence DATE OF BURIAL Dec 18, 1919

20 UNDERTAKER John McAlister ADDRESS City

**Death Certificates**  
Death certificates will include date and place of death, the cause of death, and very often information about either the decedent's spouse and family, parents, or both.

Like birth records, most have been kept at the state level since around 1900 and the county level before that, and many are available and searchable online.

### Social Security Death Index

The Social Security Death Index tells you the date of death, date of

birth, when and where the SSN was issued, and the city where benefits were last paid (not the place of death). It is fully searchable online and easy to use. However, this only helps for those ancestors who had Social Security Numbers issued, so it isn't much help before 1950, and somewhat incomplete up to around 1970 or so.

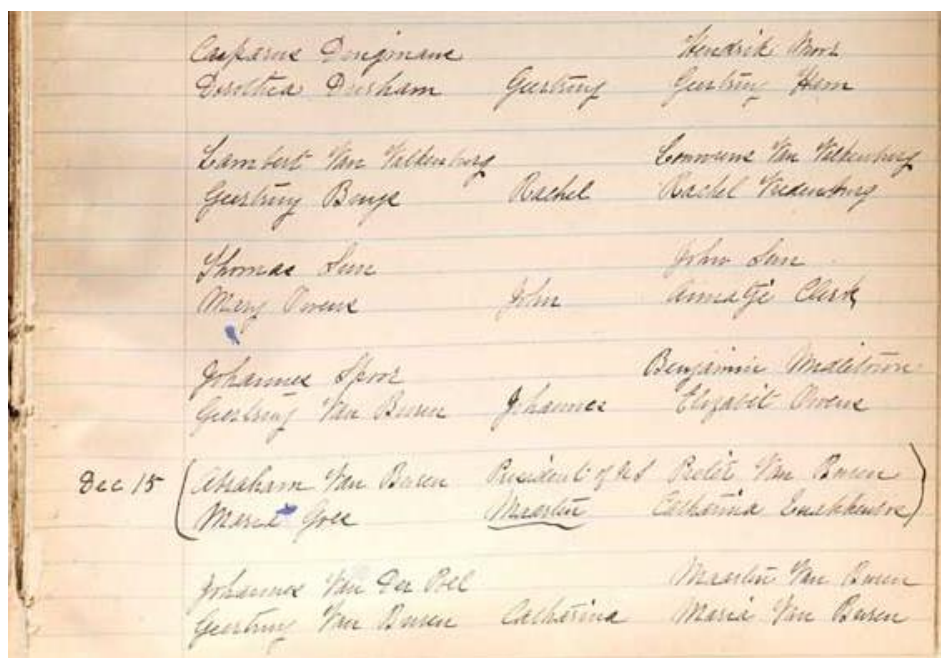
### Baptism Records

Baptism records will list the date of the baptism and, for children, the child's parents. It may also list the date of birth. These are mostly only found in church records.

*Baptism record of President Martin Van Buren*

### Wills and Probate Records

These records vary widely in the information they contain, but can be great sources for names of



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Many passenger lists are now online. Your local genealogical library may also have a copy of Filby's Passenger and Immigration Lists Index, which before the internet indexed every passenger list that was published in a print source. This index can also be found online at [worldvitalrecords.com](http://worldvitalrecords.com), but requires a subscription.

## Naturalization Records

Once your ancestors arrived, they likely wanted to become citizens. Applications for naturalization can include great information including name, date of birth, place of birth, date, and place of immigration, and more. Many of these records can be found online, or check out county, circuit, or district court records.

Top section of naturalization application for Elias Sanders, father of Senator Bernie Sanders

Form 2204-T  
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR  
NATURALIZATION SERVICE

83070 ORIGINAL  
FEB 14 1928 9-00

**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**  
**PETITION FOR NATURALIZATION**

To the Honorable the District Court of the United States for the Eastern District of New York:

The petition of Elias Sanders hereby filed, respectfully sheweth

First. My place of residence is 1672 Broadway, New Brooklyn (Give number, street, city or town, and State.)

Second. My occupation is merchant

Third. I was born on the 14th day of September, anno Domini 1904, at Stopnice, Austria

Fourth. I emigrated to the United States from Antwerp, Belgium, on or about the 26th day of May, anno Domini 1921, and arrived in the United States, at the port of New York, on the 11th day of June, anno Domini 1921, on the vessel Lapland (If the alien arrived otherwise than by vessel, the character of conveyance or mode of transportation company should be given.)

Fifth. I declared my intention to become a citizen of the United States on the 2nd day of April, anno Domini 1923, at New York, in the Supreme Court of Kings County

Sixth. I am not married. My (wife's / husband's) name is \_\_\_\_\_; (she / he) was born on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, anno Domini 1\_\_\_\_\_, at \_\_\_\_\_, and now resides at \_\_\_\_\_ (Give number, street, city or town, and State.)

I have \_\_\_\_\_ children, and the name, date and place of birth, and place of residence of each of said children is as follows: \_\_\_\_\_

## Draft Cards

Several drafts have taken place in U.S. history, and even if your ancestor never served in the military, he might have had to fill out a draft card. They can give you name, date, and place of birth, place of residence, and even sometimes a physical description.

REGISTRATION CARD

1. Name in full Harold Mann No. 2283

2. Home 258 E 72 (City) NY (State) NY

3. Date of birth Feb 6 1896

4. Are you (1) a natural-born citizen, (2) a naturalized citizen, (3) an alien, (4) or have you declared your intention (specify which)? Nat Born

5. Where were you born? NY City (City) NY (State) NY

6. If not a citizen, of what country are you a citizen or subject?

7. What is your present trade, occupation, or office? Actor 28

8. By whom employed? Not employed

9. Where employed? \_\_\_\_\_

10. Have you a father, mother, wife, child under 18, or a sister or brother under 21, solely dependent on you for support (specify which)? Wife & Baby

11. Married or single (which)? Married Race (specify which)? Kn

12. What military service have you had? Rank Ans. 1st Lt. Col. years 6 mos. Nation or State France

13. Do you claim exemption from draft (specify grounds)? No

I affirm that I have verified above answers and that they are true.

Harold Mann (Signature of registrant)

REGISTRAR'S REPORT 31-9-133-A

1. Tall, medium, or short (specify which)? Tall Stature, medium, or stout (which)? Medium

2. Color of eyes? Gray Color of hair? Dark Build? 75

3. Has person lost arm, leg, hand, foot, or both eyes, or is he otherwise disabled (specify)? No

I certify that my answers are true, that the person registered has read his own answers, that I have witnessed his signature, and that all of his answers of which I have knowledge are true, except as follows: \_\_\_\_\_

Francis E. Jones (Signature of registrar)

Present 19/2  
City or County NY  
State NY (Date of registration)

WWI draft card for Brooks Benedict aka Harold Mann

Records from the 1942 draft are available online. For other drafts, check out the National Archives and Records Administration ([www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov)).

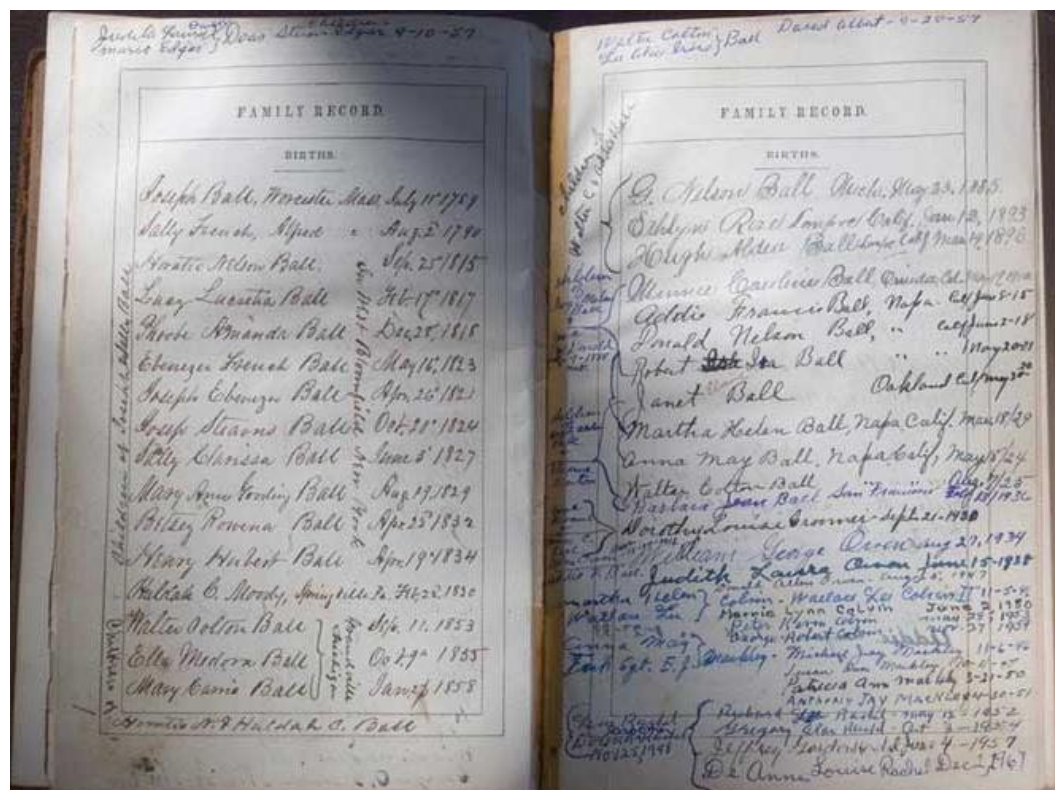
## City Directories

Before there were phones and

phone books, there were city directories. These can tell you not only where your ancestors lived, but their occupation as well. Some city directories are available online, while others can be found in local libraries.

### Family Bibles

If you can track down an old family bible, you may find a treasure trove of genealogical data. Families often recorded every birth, baptism, marriage, and death in their family bible, sometimes for several generations. Check with all your living relatives to see if there is a family bible lurking on a bookshelf or in a closet somewhere.



(CC BY 2.5)

### Obituaries

Obituaries vary a lot in what they include, but often list not only the decedent's full name, date of birth, and date and place of death, but also their parents, spouse, children, and grandchildren, and their spouses, too. There are a variety of obituary indexes online, such as [Legacy.com](https://www.legacy.com) and [Obituaries.com](https://www.obituaries.com). Specific newspapers

can be searched, too, either through the newspaper's site or at [Newspapers.com](https://www.newspapers.com).

### Cemetery Records

Cemeteries keep records of every interment which may include a lot more information than you think, including not only date and place of death but the place of birth, parents, spouse, and even names of children. Some cemeteries have their records available online, but many you will need to contact them individually. There are no formal indexes of cemetery records online, but one great source to start with is [Findagrave.com](https://www.findagrave.com).

### Tombstones

Once you've found your ancestor's grave, the tombstone can provide some helpful hints including dates of birth and death, spouse, and sometimes children. Photos of many tombstones are available at [Findagrave.com](https://www.findagrave.com), but the best way is to visit the cemetery yourself. It helps you feel a direct connection with your ancestors. Just as important, going in person gives you the chance to check other graves nearby. Sometimes several generations of a family were buried within a few feet of each other, so be sure to check out nearby tombstones as well.

## Old Family Photos

Names, dates, and places are all well and good, but if you can put a face with a name, that's a thousand times more satisfying. And finding photos of your ancestors may not be as hard as you think. The best place to start of course is with your own family. Reach out to every relative you can and see what they might have lurking in their photo albums. Even if they don't have photos, they may know which family member does have them and point you in the right direction. Most genealogy websites allow you to do photo searches, too, though their collection size can vary a lot.

One site called DeadFred.com not only lets you search for photos, but offers to send you a free copy if you find a direct ancestor.

Others places you might find photos include:

- newspapers
- military records
- business directories
- passport applications
- prison and hospital records
- the Library of Congress photo collection

Many libraries and historical societies have photo collections, too.

## Interviews

Written records are not the only source of information; one of your best sources is other family members. Talk to your family, especially older relatives, and you will be amazed at some of the stories you learn. Personal stories add texture to your ancestors, fleshing out those names and dates into real people.

Interviews can also help you understand why some records contradict. For example, on one census I found a cousin (Edward) who was listed as my great-great-grandfather's son, but on the next census, Edward was listed as his grandson. By talking to a great-aunt, I came to learn that Edward was my great-great-grandfather's grandson, but because his mother was unmarried when he was born, they pretended Edward was their son for several years to avoid embarrassment.

There are three big keys to interviewing:

- the sooner, the better – if you wait too long, those stories may vanish forever
- record the interview – on tape, or digitally, you're going to want to listen to it again. Better yet, record it on video – imagine how pleased your grandchildren will be to watch their great-great-grandfather telling family stories 50 years from now
- prepare questions ahead of time – if you don't know what you're after, the interview may break down into rambling, disjointed stories

## Where to Find Common Records

### Online Resources

There are literally hundreds of thousands of websites dedicated to genealogy and family history, but not all are created equal. Here is a rundown on some of the most important and useful websites for your research.

### Ancestry.com

[Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) has thousands of data collections available online, containing millions of individual records. It also lets you build your family tree directly online, or upload a family tree from your computer. Once your family tree is online at Ancestry, it will try to find common ancestors with other users who may have already done a lot of the research on your family themselves.

Be warned, sometimes these other family trees are quite useful, but sometimes they are poorly done, and can even set back your research if you don't verify their information. Ancestry is only available by a paid subscription, but most public libraries have a subscription, so you can go to the library and use theirs.

### **FamilySearch.org**

FamilySearch.org is operated by the Family History Library in Utah, and provides access to all of their records that have been digitized so far. Like Ancestry, FamilySearch lets you build your family tree online and connect with other existing trees. FamilySearch is entirely free for anyone to use.

### **Rootsweb.com**

Rootsweb, now owned and operated by Ancestry.com, is an online community of genealogists and family historians. It includes a huge collection of records that have been digitized and put online by volunteers. Many of these records come from cemeteries, courthouses, churches, and family bibles, and are not available anywhere else online. It also organizes these records by county and community, making it easier to find records if you are looking in a specific location. Rootsweb also hosts surname communities, where you can connect and share information with others researching the same surname. Rootsweb is free to use.

### **Newspapers.com**

Newspapers.com has digitized more than 5,000 different newspapers stretching as far back as the 1700s, and is constantly adding new images (they are already at 280 million newspaper pages!). Many local newspapers included birth, engagement/wedding announcements, social gatherings, obituaries, and more. You may even find a drawing or photo of your ancestors if you're lucky. Newspapers.com does require a paid subscription, but currently offers a seven-day free trial so you can test it out first. Some libraries maintain a subscription to the site, too.

### **Fold3.com**

Fold3 specializes in military records from the Revolutionary War to the present. If your ancestors ever served in the military, you have a good chance of finding them there. Fold3 not only includes official records, but photos, stories, and personal documents as well. Fold3 offers both free and paid memberships, but many of its records require a paid membership to access.

### **Findagrave.com**

Find A Grave is a great site for doing just that, finding the graves of your ancestors. There are over 180 million grave records currently available, with more being added all the time. In many cases, there are even photos of the headstones. If not, you can place a request for a local genealogy buff to photograph it for you - for free! The site also includes forums where you can ask all your grave hunting questions. Find A Grave is free to use.

### **Cyndislist.com**

If you are looking for a genealogy site, any genealogy site, you can find it on Cyndi's List. Cyndi's List is one of the oldest genealogy sites on the web, and potentially the most useful. It basically lists every genealogy site on the web. Yes, every single one (over 320,000 at the moment). And it is constantly updated as new sites appear and old ones vanish. Cyndi's List is organized in several ways, letting you find the sites you want quickly. It is great for identifying specialized websites for specific countries, states, counties, interests, types of records, and more. Cyndi's List is free, but donations are always welcome.

## **Offline Resources: Records Repositories**

While genealogical records are available online more and more often these days, don't limit yourself to just computer searches, or you will miss a lot. There are several important repositories that house millions of genealogical records, and you should be familiar with them. Just as important as the records, these repositories have librarians and genealogy experts who can help you narrow your search, navigate tricky records, and find what you want, often for free!

### **Family History Library**

The Family History Library houses the largest collection of genealogical materials in the world. The main library is located in Salt Lake City, Utah, but there are more than 2,000 branch locations, called Family History Centers, located all over the world.

Every Family History Center has dedicated, experienced staff who are ready to help you plan out and conduct your search. Each center has its own collection of local materials and access to billions of digitized records online.

Also, if something hasn't been put online yet but is in the Family History Library collection, you can request it to be delivered to your nearest center for local use. This includes books, magazines, microfilmed documents, and more. For more information about the Family History Library and to search their online collections, visit [FamilySearch.org](https://www.familysearch.org).

### **National Archives**

The U.S. National Archives, located in Washington, DC, houses a wealth of documents of interest to genealogists.

Examples of records you can find in the National Archives include:

- military records from the Revolutionary War to the present, including pension files and casualty lists
- passenger lists
- census records from 1790 to 1940
- naturalization records for those who became American citizens in a federal court
- American Indian tribal rolls and related records
- passport applications
- federal land grants
- and much, much more!

While many of these records are now available online, many others are not. A trip to the National Archives can help you learn a lot, but only if you plan ahead. Examine the online indexes ahead of time to see what records you will want to access. This will save you lots of time and headaches during your visit. There are also several Federal Records Centers associated with the National Archives around the country. One of these might be a much closer, less expensive trip if they have the records you need.

### **State Libraries**

Each state maintains a state library, and they are often a good place to start looking. Most state libraries have special genealogy sections and staff members to help with your research. Some records that you can expect to find at state libraries include:

- U.S. census records
- state census records, if the state ever did its own census
- state and county histories that can fill in the story about where and how your ancestors lived

- many county histories published in the 1800s had extensive biographical information about people living in the county at the time
- newspapers from across the state, both print and microfilm, often going back into the 1880s or even earlier
- family history books and genealogies privately published by state residents
- journals and newsletters from genealogical societies within the state

### **Local Libraries**

Your local library may have more than you think, especially if your family has lived in the area for several decades. But even if they haven't, keep in mind that wherever your ancestors did live, there was a local library there, too. Local libraries are great resources for:

- local newspapers that may not be held at the state library
- local histories, published or unpublished
- clippings files – many libraries clip out important newspaper articles and sort them by topic; in many cases, they have clippings files for important local surnames, too!
- general history resources you can use to learn more about your ancestors' world

One very important "local" library for genealogists is the Allen County Public Library ([www.acpl.lib.in.us](http://www.acpl.lib.in.us)) in Fort Wayne, Indiana. This library's genealogy collection is second only to the Family History Library. While you may not be able to travel there, if you find something they own that you need, you might be able to access it through interlibrary loan.

### **Courthouses**

The county courthouse where your ancestors lived likely contains some valuable records that may not be found anywhere else, such as:

- birth and death certificates (especially before 1900)
- marriage certificates and divorce decrees
- adoption records
- deeds or other land records
- wills and probate records
- some military service records
- tax records

They are also the place to look for court cases, too, whether your ancestor was a plaintiff, defendant, or witness.

### **Churches**

Finding the right church to search for your ancestors' records can be tough, but it is often well worth it. In many cases, especially before the middle of the 19th century, churches were the only repository for certain records, including baptisms and marriages. But in some cases, they might be your only source for births and deaths, too.

They may also include when your ancestors became members or transferred to a different church, helping you trace what years they lived in the area. Unfortunately, most church records are not available online. Worse, many of them have been lost over the years to fires, floods, or simple neglect. Still, the rewards can certainly be worth the effort.

### **Genealogical Societies**

Every state, nearly every county, and even many towns have a genealogical society. State genealogical societies will carry many of the same kinds of records as state libraries. County and local genealogical

societies are excellent sources for records from a specific area, including those that you won't find anywhere else, like high school commencement programs as an example. Best of all, local societies have local experts, folks who may recognize your family name, and may even have done research on it. Most genealogical societies also publish a journal or newsletter with tidbits gleaned from print records that don't appear anywhere else.

### **A note on searching outside the United States**

Chances are at some point you are going to trace your ancestors back to when they arrived in the United States. You could stop there, but where's the fun in that? Every country has organizations and resources similar to the ones already mentioned. Some of them, such as county courthouses, local libraries, genealogical societies, and churches, are going to be nearly identical in what records they hold. There are too many national archives to list here, but a web search should quickly pop up the ones you need to keep digging further into the past.

### **DNA Tests**

Over the last ten to fifteen years, DNA tests have become a popular way to pursue ancestors and locate long-lost family branches. But how do they work, and what do they actually tell you?

There are three types of DNA tests, and they all tell you different things.

- Autosomal DNA looks at how similar certain sections of DNA are to other living people, and works best to locate cousins and others who are related to you within the past four to five generations.
- YDNA testing examines only the Y-chromosome, so it only works in men, but can trace a male line back for many generations. YDNA is only passed from father to son (ie your father, your father's father, and so on...)
- Mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) testing can also trace a line back for many generations, but only a maternal line. mtDNA passes from a mother to all of her children (not just sons) and applies only to that one female branch of the tree.

If you are trying to verify that you are related to a specific ancestor, then the YDNA (for a male ancestor) or mtDNA (for a female ancestor) are the way to go. Note that since only men have a Y-chromosome, women who want to use the YDNA test will need to have a close male relative, such as a father or brother, take it for them instead. The test used most often in genealogical research is the autosomal DNA test, because it is the most useful for linking you with close living relatives.

### **How does DNA testing work?**

- You order a kit
- You use the kit to collect a DNA sample (either a saliva sample or cheek swab)
- You return the kit to the lab, which creates a genetic profile
- In roughly six to eight weeks, your results are emailed to you

An autosomal DNA test can help your genealogical research in two ways:

- It gives you a general idea of your ethnic background – that is, the regions from which your ancestors came
- It can connect you with others who have been tested and are a close match

Keep in mind that autosomal DNA is a merger of DNA from both of your parents. The further back you go, the more mergers have taken place. Because of that, an autosomal DNA test is only useful for those related within about five generations (third cousins or closer). On the other hand, mtDNA changes

extremely slowly. If your mtDNA is identical to someone else's, that proves that you have a common ancestor – but that common ancestor could go back 50 generations!

**DNA Testing Companies:** There are three main companies that do genealogical DNA testing:

**Ancestry DNA** [www.ancestry.com/dna](http://www.ancestry.com/dna)

- Only offers autosomal DNA testing
- Lets you link your DNA results to your Ancestry family tree (requires a paid Ancestry.com subscription)
- Lets you connect with others who share the same DNA markers if they have made their results public

Read our full review of AncestryDNA [here](#). Ancestry DNA tests occasionally go on sale.

**23andMe** [www.23andme.com](http://www.23andme.com)

- You can choose from any of the three tests
- You have the option of using a tool to connect with others (but only if they are using it, too)
- Considered the most accurate for determining regions of origin through mtDNA or YDNA testing

Read our complete 23andMe review [here](#).

**Family Tree DNA** [www.familytreedna.com](http://www.familytreedna.com)

- You can choose from any of the three tests
- Lets you contact and be contacted by everyone with matching markers
- Allows you to upload data from tests run by other companies
- Considered the best overall by genealogists for autosomal DNA tests

FTDNA is also the company we recommend if you want to [test for your Native American ancestry](#).

Costs vary depending on the company and specific test done, but expect your test to run about \$80 to \$200 on average. Read our in-depth [FTDNA review here](#). You can also check out our [full guide here](#) on the best DNA test kits.

## Genealogy TV Shows

### Finding Your Roots

Produced by PBS and now in its third season, Finding Your Roots delves into the genealogy of guest celebrities. The show uses a variety of methods to trace its guests' family trees and identify some previously unknown (and unexpected) ancestors and relatives. Finding Your Roots can give you a good overview of different methods genealogists use in tracking down information.

### Who Do You Think You Are?

Who Do You Think You Are first aired in Great Britain in 2004, and has now gone through 13 seasons. Not only that, it has gone on to ten other countries as well, including the U.S., where a show of the same name airs on TLC. Like Finding Your Roots, Who Do You Think You Are features a different celebrity guest on each episode and uses a range of genealogical methods and resources to trace their family histories.

### Long Lost Family

Long Lost Family is another show that first started on the BBC, but has since come to the United States as well. The show uses genealogy to connect relatives who have never met one another before. The people featured in the show are not celebrities, but everyday folks who have been searching in vain for years for their missing relatives.

## Genealogy Roadshow

Another PBS offering, Genealogy Roadshow visits historically important locations, where the hosts help those with specific genealogy problems find their answers.

## Books and Magazines

There are far too many helpful books and magazines to list them all here, so I will offer just a few suggestions. Before shopping, though, be aware that you can spend hundreds, even thousands of dollars on genealogy books if you're not careful. Chances are you'll never use half of them. So here are my general recommendations: Get one good basic guide, such as *Genealogy for Dummies*. Buy one guide for organizing your research, and one for documenting it. Then stop, and consider the states or countries you expect to research. If you know you are going to be doing a lot of research on a specific area, consider picking up a guide for that area. And that's it. Stop there for now. You can always buy more later, or, to save money, borrow them from the library as you need them.

### Books

Here are a few books that I highly recommend. There are many other good sources out there, but these are ones I know are great.

*Genealogy for Dummies*: a good overall guide, easy to use, and covers all the basics

*Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace* by Elizabeth Shown Mills - documenting sources is essential in genealogy, and this comprehensive guide shows you how

*Organizing Your Family History Search* by Sharon DeBartolo Carmack - helps you plan out your genealogy searches in advance, saving countless hours of wasted time

*Long Distance Genealogy* by Christine Crawford-Oppenheim - find and obtain documents and family records from libraries, archives, family history centers, microfilm, and the internet, all without leaving home

*Courthouse Research for Family Historians* by Christine Rose - helps you navigate the often confusing but vitally important records located in county courthouses

*Organize Your Genealogy* by Drew Smith - once you've gathered all that information, this guide helps you get it all organized

### Magazines

As with books, there are countless magazines dedicated to genealogy and family history. Here are just a few of the most popular:

- *Family Tree Magazine*
- *Your Genealogy Today* (formerly *Family Chronicle*)
- *Internet Genealogy*
- *Who Do You Think You Are?* Magazine

All of these have websites, so you can get an idea of what they cover. They are often available at your local library as well, especially if it has a genealogy section.

### Hiring a professional

Not sure you want to do all the work yourself, or that you even can? You might consider hiring a professional, but it will cost you. On average, rates vary from \$35 to \$60 an hour, plus expenses.

In most cases, the only time you should need to hire a professional genealogist to help you is if:

- you're super rich and don't want to do the work yourself (where's the fun in that?)
- you've hit a roadblock, and you just don't know what to do next
- you need to do in-depth local research, and it's too far to travel yourself

- you need an expert to translate records from a foreign language
- you want expert help to compile a print genealogy or family history

If you do decide to hire a professional, you should look for one who has been accredited by one or more bodies. You can find lists of accredited genealogical researchers at:

- The Association of Professional Genealogists ([www.apgen.org](http://www.apgen.org))
- Board for Certification of Genealogists ([www.bcgcertification.org](http://www.bcgcertification.org))
- The International Commission for the Accreditation of Professional Genealogists ([www.icapgen.org](http://www.icapgen.org))

## Conclusion

There you have it, everything you need to get started on what for many is a lifelong hobby, and for some even a profession. It may seem daunting at first, but it only takes a few minutes to get started. Once you start connecting with your ancestors and your family's history, you will never want to stop. But remember, the most important thing is to start now. Happy hunting!

## About the Author



### **Marc McDermott**

*Managing Editor*

Marc McDermott is a genealogist, family historian, and blogger living in New Jersey. Marc is a member of the National Genealogical Society, an annual attendee of Rootstech, and an active participant in several genealogy and DNA Facebook groups. He also volunteers as a DNA search angel and has helped dozens of adoptees identify their birth parents.

Marc's aim with this site is to break down complicated topics related to family history into easy-to-understand pieces that will help others find their own family histories. [Learn more](#).