

Home Sources

Genealogical research is much like charity. It should begin at home. The first step involves recording everything you know about your family. The following points listed below are of particular importance:

1. Inquire about the existence of official documents or memorabilia that may have been saved or put in storage
2. Talk to parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, even neighbors.
3. When you interview older members of the family, consider recording their answers and memories on tape or video to preserve the information for future generations.
4. These interviews, also known as **Oral Histories**, may help you in future research. When a discrepancy arises; the tape may help you clarify what was actually said.
5. Family documents, photos and other sources can provide you with many valuable clues to get you started on your genealogy adventure.
6. They may include the names of ancestors, dates and places for births, marriages and deaths and insight into what life was like for your ancestors.
7. In almost every family, one or two members, perhaps more, become the "unofficial" family record holders. Perhaps we should call them the "family archivist." For some reason, key family documents end up in their hands.

One barrier to the efficient use of home sources is the inevitable difficult family member. While there are some families where one member hoards the family records, and does not share, this is relatively uncommon. In such situations, be as kind and persuasive as possible in asking the individual for permission to examine such records. When dealing with a difficult family member, avoid any mention of taking the records with you and returning them at a later date. Your chances of success in this type of situation are slim and none.

In other families where this is a problem, the record holder is usually worried about preserving the records, and concerned that if he or she loans them to a family member, they may get accidentally lost or destroyed. The best strategy is to gradually gain their confidence by first requesting permission to examine the records in their presence. Make careful notes. At a later date, as you get closer to your family member, he or she will come to trust you more, and may volunteer to let you take the records to make photocopies. When it comes to historical documents and/or family heirlooms, overcoming barriers within a family, even in the best of circumstances, is usually a gradual process. This is particularly true if they are in the possession of an elderly family member.

Some of the most popular and informative types of home sources are listed below. A more detailed chart will follow at the end of this study guide. The bibliography at the end of this study guide will list sources for additional research in tracking home source record types.

Family Bible Records

In previous generations, the family Bible was the one place where the most important family life events were recorded. The amount of information varies, as does the accuracy, but in most cases it is a very reliable starting point for research. In many cases, information concerning multiple generations was recorded. The Bible was handed down from generation

to generation, usually to the eldest son or daughter. Some Bibles contain separate pages where birth and death dates were recorded. Others follow no particular pattern and must simply be examined.

If you find a family Bible, check the date of publication. For instance, if the date of publication of the Bible is 1829 and the first entry is for the year 1762, you know the entry wasn't made at the time of the actual event. This may affect the accuracy of the entry. Family Bibles may be the only source for genealogical information pertaining to births, marriages, and deaths in localities where public records have been destroyed by fires or wars. This may also be true in areas where these events took place before the advent of civil record keeping.

Old Letters

If your family members were letter savers, these can be excellent sources for identifying family relationships and events, which affected family members. Letter writers passed on to relatives and friends news of births, deaths, marriages, and personal observations. When examining old letters keep these points in mind:

1. Name and relationship of the writer
2. Date and place from which the letter was written
3. Address on the letter which would probably be the address from which it was written and the home of the writer
4. Date the letter was written
5. Genealogical value of the letter

Journals and Diaries

The genealogical value of these sources depends on the methods and thoroughness used by the original compiler. These sources may detail some or all of the following events:

1. Movements from place to place
2. Dates of births, deaths, marriages, and divorces
3. Personal observations (may be useful in reconstructing the time period)

Photographs

Old photographs may be very useful for the genealogist, especially if they were labeled with the names and details of the people appearing in the photograph and the date the picture was taken. Photographs of men in uniform may indicate the branch of service and regiment in which they served.

Church Baptism or Christening Certificates

These documents will usually give the date of baptism or christening and the date of birth for the individual. Obtaining a certificate from a church can be much faster and cheaper than obtaining a certificate from public records. These certificates can be obtained from most churches regardless of whether they practice infant or adult baptism. The exception to this rule is contacting small churches or those located in remote locations. They may or may not issue formal certificates. In some cases, the best you can get is a photocopy from the ministers' logbook.

Scrapbooks

Old scrapbooks kept by families may include items such as newspaper clippings, photographs of family members, pictures of houses the family has lived in, or other items that

may provide clues to places of residence, occurrence of important events, and other information of interest to the researcher. You may also find obituaries in these books. Obituaries are especially important because they usually list the surviving family members.

Certificates of Birth, Marriage, and Death

These documents are usually prepared at or near the time of the recorded date. One can be reasonably confident of their authenticity and accuracy. The amount of information included can vary depending on the jurisdiction. Finding any of these certificates in your home will eliminate the necessity of obtaining them from public sources at a later date, if they exist at all. This will save the researcher time and money.

Family Histories

Many families have a person who has acquired the label "Family Historian". Frequently in large families, it turns out to be the youngest daughter or son. If you are lucky, this person may have taken the initiative and compiled a family history either in book or manuscript format. This person frequently has custody of the family Bible which has been handed down through the generations.

Memorial Cards

Prior to World War II, many families announced the death of an individual by sending a printed or beautifully handwritten memorial card to family members, friends, or business associates. This is still true, but more in foreign countries than in America. Information given usually included the name of the deceased, date of death, and place of burial. Some would also include highlights of the person's life and a favorite saying or small poetic verse. These cards were more common among Catholic and the more traditional Protestant denominations such as Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists, and Episcopalians.

Legal Papers

Items in this category may include copies of wills, deeds, land grants, citizenship papers, naturalization papers, and passports. These items can be used to establish places of residence, dates of birth, ownership of land, and ownership of items of value which could lead the researcher to other valuable records. When beginning your search for home sources, be sure to check the following places:

1. Your home
2. Parents' home
3. Homes of close relatives
4. Friends and neighbors who were close to your parents and family

CHECKLIST OF POTENTIAL RECORD SOURCES IN THE HOME

From the standpoint of genealogical research, the following checklist contains the most common and useful record types that tend to be found in the homes of family members or relatives. If your personal circumstances caused you to lose touch with your family, it is possible that a close neighbor or friend of the family may have some of these items in their possession.

PERSONAL RECORDS

Journal
Diary
Biography
Letters
Photographs
Autograph Album
Personal Knowledge
Baby Book
Wedding Book
Scrapbooks
Funeral Book
Guest register
Travel Account/Log
Bookplates

CERTIFICATES

Birth
Marriage
Death
Divorce
Adoption
Graduation
Christening
Blessing
Baptism
Confirmation
Ordination
Ministerial
Membership
Apprenticeship
Mission Release
Achievement
Award

FAMILY RECORDS

Bible
Pedigrees
Family Group Sheets
Genealogies
Books of Remembrance
Family Bulletins
Family Histories
Printed Histories
Manuscript Histories
Local Histories
Family Traditions
"Birth Briefs"

MILITARY RECORDS

Service
Pension
Disability
Discharge
National Guard
Selective Service
Bounty Award
Service Medals
Ribbons
Sword
Firearms
Uniform
Citations
Separation papers
War Rosters/Memorials

LEGAL PAPERS

Wills
Deeds
Land Grants
Water Rights
Mortgages
Leases
Bonds
Loans
Contracts
Summons
Subpoena
Tax Notices
Guardian Papers
Abstracts of Title
Adoption Papers

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Wedding
Birth
Death
Funeral
Graduation
Divorce
Anniversary
Memorial Cards
New Job
Travel
New Home
Birthday
Professional
Engagement

MEMBERSHIP RECORDS

Cards
 Publications
 Programs
 Uniforms
 Awards

HEALTH RECORDS

X-rays
 Insurance Reports
 Hospital Records
 Medical Records
 Immunizations

SCHOOL RECORDS

Diplomas
 Report Cards
 Honor Roll
 Awards
 Transcripts
 Yearbooks
 Publications
 Alumni Lists
 Frats/Sororities

CITIZENSHIP PAPERS

Naturalization
 Denization
 Alien Registration
 Deportment
 Passport
 Visa
 Vaccination

NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS

Announcements
 Obituaries
 Special Events
 Vital Statistics
 Home Town Newspapers
 Professional
 trade
 Human Interest

LICENSES

Business
 Occupation
 Professional
 Hunting
 Firearms
 Drivers
 Motor Vehicle Registration

FINANCIAL RECORDS

Accounts
 Bills
 Receipts
 Check Stubs
 Estate records

HOUSEHOLD ITEMS

Silverware
 Needlework
 Sampler
 Tapestries
 Dishes
 Friendship Quilt
 Coat of Arms
 Insignias
 Souvenirs
 Clothing
 Tools
 Plaques
 Engraved Jewelry

BOOKS

Atlases
 Yearbooks
 Textbooks
 Prizes
 Treasured Volumes
 Vocational
 Foreign Language
 Incriptions
 Bibles

EMPLOYMENT RECORDS

Apprenticeship
Awards
Graduation
Citations
Severance papers
Social Security
Retirement papers
Pension
Union
Income tax

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NOTE: This study guide is meant to serve as an overview or outline for patrons using the genealogy collection at Fort Myers-Lee County Library. The compiler emphasizes that the information contained in this study guide should not serve as a substitute for taking the time to read one of the books or articles cited in the bibliography, or attend lectures given by the subject specialists cited as authors.

Compiled by Bryan Mulcahy, Reference Librarian, Fort Myers-Lee County Library, 9/4/2008.

