

GETTING STARTED
(Free advice from Jerry Hale)
December 21, 2004

1. START WITH YOURSELF. Use the Family Group Sheet. Fill out one for your present family, yourself, your spouse and your children. Then fill out one for your parental family showing yourself as a child and listing all of your siblings. Next fill out a Family Group Sheet on your spouse's family showing him or her as a child. Keep working backwards, filling in information as you find it. These Family Group Sheets will be essential to knowing where you are, what you know, what you have proven and what you still need. Get copies of vital records which are birth, marriage and death certificates.

The successful genealogist keeps good records. The forms you will need can be found, free at <http://www.pbs.org/kbyu/ancestors/charts/> or at <http://www.familytreemagazine.com/forms/download.html> <http://www.io.com/~jhaller/forms/forms.html> perhaps the best site is <http://www.ancestry.com/save/charts/ancechart.htm>

2. Find the oldest people you know in your family and/or any friends of your parents or grandparents. Interview them. Use the interview list to help you make sure you don't overlook any questions that might jog the memory of the person you are interviewing. Use a camcorder if possible or a tape recorder at least. You will not be able to take effective notes without impeding the flow of information from the person you are interviewing.

3. From the very beginning keep a correspondence log and a research log. These logs will save you a lot of duplication in the future.

4. It is absolutely ESSENTIAL that you record the source of EVERY TINY FACT that you record. This is called DOCUMENTATION. You should be aware of a saying among genealogists "Undocumented genealogy is mythology." Read the book "Evidence" by Elizabeth Shown Mills to learn about primary, secondary and tertiary sources. Even if your source is "Mama says so," record that as your source. If you find a better source later you can replace "Mama says so." with "Birth certificate # such and so."

5. The census records form the skeleton upon which you will build the rest of your research. Begin with the latest available census (1930 at this writing.) Find your family listed there. Use the proper 1930 Census form, (available at Ancestry.com and other places) to make sure you record ALL of the information. Don't omit anything, it will be helpful later. Work backwards, using later census records to tell you where to look for your family in earlier censuses. Don't forget to look in state census records. Check to see what census records are available for the state you are working with.

You will find census records for 1880 and for 1850 in the Genealogy Room of the DeLand Public library as well as printed indexes for most states from 1790, our first Federal census through 1860.

All of the census records for the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom are on the internet. These records require a subscription to one service or another. The subscription for Ancestry.com is perhaps the most useful but also the most expensive. If you subscribe to the Godfrey Memorial Library (<http://www.godfrey.org>) you will pay \$35 per year. For that \$35 you will have access to all of the U.S. Federal census records 1790-1930, through their link to Heritage Quest. Many censuses have an index online, for the rest you can use the printed index at the library. I find it most effective to Xerox the appropriate pages from the index, highlight the ones I'm interested in and then access Heritage Quest for the actual search.

Be aware that every surname will have variations in spelling. The name YOHE, for example, has 13 variations. Census enumerators wrote the name down the way they thought it sounded and sometimes their formation of certain letters was confusing. Therefore I have found many YOHE families indexed as YOKE or YOHEY. Never be tied to a certain spelling, it will cause you grief. A friend rejects any KESSLER families because his name is KESLER. He wonders why he cannot follow his family back very far.

6. When you have the skeleton formed you will know where to look for vital records for each family member. Vital records are often available ONLY in the county archives. Be aware that county boundaries changed over the years. You will need to know what the county was at the time your ancestors lived there then you will know where to look for the records you need.

7. Become familiar with the Family History Centers (FHC) sponsored by the Latter Day Saints (Mormon) Church. The LDS is the foremost source of family history. Most places have a branch, there are branches in DeLand, Daytona Beach and Lake Mary. Learn what the International Genealogical Index (IGI) is and check it early on to see if anyone has already published their research on your family. If they have it will save you a lot of time and trouble.

Use a good search engine, such as GOOGLE. Learn about all of the things you can do with GOOGLE besides a simple key word search. If you need a photo of the ship your ancestors came on use the GOOGLE image search, there just might be a photo you can use as there was for the Great Eastern upon which my ancestors arrived in 1862. Search on your surname to see who has posted their research on your family line. Also check "World Connect" at <http://www.RootsWeb.com> and the family search at the LDS site http://www.familysearch.org/Eng/Search/frameset_search.asp

8. Although the internet is a wonderful resource and is becoming more useful every day be aware that much of the information available is wrong. Many people are not

very diligent about their research, some are simply “name collectors” who accept any information from anyone and incorporate it into their own database without recorded sources which would allow the information to be verified. This type of genealogy is to be avoided at all costs; better to have 10 well documented ancestors than to have 1,000 people with the right name but who are not actually your ancestors!

9. When you are ready to use the internet start with Cyndi’s List

<http://www.cyndislist.com> Cyndi has, at this writing, “231,250 categorized & cross-referenced links.”

10. One of the best features of the internet are the “mail lists” which are sponsored by RootsWeb (<http://www.rootsweb.com>) and other organizations. When you sign up for a mail list you can post an inquiry about your family and it will go to everyone who is signed up for the list. I recommend signing up for the mail list for every surname you are researching plus every state and every county where your ancestors lived. A good general list is called ROOTS-L. There are also lists on research areas such as ships passenger lists etc. When you post a message to a mail list be sure that the subject line has specific information about your query. A bad subject line would be: LOOKING FOR MY FAMILY. A good subject line would be: JONES NY>IN>IA ca 1850. Members of the list will receive many messages and will discard without reading, any messages with non-specific subject lines.

A similar resource is the MESSAGE BOARDS which are run by various organizations. There are message boards at Ancestry.com, RootsWeb.com, MyGenealogy.com and probably many more. A message board is like a bulletin board, you post a message and then go back later to see if anyone has answered you. You can often request that an eMail message be generated whenever a reply is posted to your message. Some messages posted to message boards at RootsWeb are “gatewayed” (forwarded) onto the mailing lists. Mailing lists are, I believe, much more efficient than message boards, especially when there is a gateway from the message board.

RootsWeb is owned by Ancestry.com. It started out as a mail list called ROOTS, headquartered on the west coast. RootsWeb has grown so large that it was impossible to maintain the computer assets without charging for the service. At a point where the choice was to charge or go out of business Ancestry.com stepped in and purchased RootsWeb. Ancestry.com has maintained free access and promises to keep RootsWeb free forever. We will see.

You will find so much useful information on RootsWeb and links to another free organization called USGenWeb. USGenWeb is in the process of transcribing public records and making them available on the internet for free.

11. Join a genealogy club such as “Roots and Branches” which meets in the DeLand Public Library at 6 p.m. on the first Thursday every month except for July and

August. You will meet more experienced researchers who can help you learn how to research effectively.

12. Sign up for some free electronic newsletters such as the ones published periodically by Dick Eastman, The National Genealogy Society, the Allen County Library, the Volusia and Flagler County genealogy association etc. If you "GOOGLE" 'genealogy +newsletter +free' you will, at present, receive links to 161,224 news letters. The newsletters mentioned above are perhaps the most useful but try a few for yourself and decide whether they are worth the trouble, you can always cancel.

13. Subscribe to at least one genealogy magazine. One of the best is Family Chronicle. Others are Ancestry and Genealogical Computing.