

Family History Research

Getting Started

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Genealogical research involves a cycle of 5 basic steps

- Gather and Organize what you know
- Decide what you want to learn
- Locate and search the records
- Analyze and evaluate your findings
- Record, source and share your findings

Where do I Begin?

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What do I already know?
- What specific questions need to be answered?
- What information sources might answer my questions?
- What do the information sources actually tell me?
- What conclusions can I reach now?

Step 1: Gather and organize what you already know

- This includes your own knowledge or documents already in your possession.
- Quiz relatives for what they know or have.
- Look for certificates, letters, obituaries, photos, genealogy forms, histories, stories, etc.

Because human memory is fallible, it is important for you to keep permanent records and organize them so you can find them.

You can begin by obtaining and installing genealogy software for your home computer, and then recording the information already in your possession. **Don't forget the importance of backing up your information!**

Genealogy Software

Compatible with FamilySearch Family Tree

- Ancestral Quest
- Roots Magic
- Legacy (soon)

You can find information about other genealogy software at

https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Windows_Genealogy_Software (Windows)
https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Mac_Genealogy_Software (Mac)

Even if you store your genealogical research in a computer database, you may have copies of documents or you may want to print out copies for your files. This means that you'll need to organize a filing system to keep track of what you already know and what you are working on.

Begin by printing a pedigree_chart from your software beginning with yourself and adding as many ancestors and their information as you know. Don't worry if you're unable to fill in all of the information at this time – you'll be collecting more information as your research progresses.

Print a family group sheet for each family on your pedigree chart. This includes all the information about the father, the mother, and all of the children in each of your ancestor's families.

Step 2: Decide what additional information you need.

Doing research means trying to find the answers to questions.

With genealogy, there are an unlimited number of questions that we could ask about each of our ancestors such as:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| What was their name? | When and where were they born? |
| When and where did they marry? | Who did they marry? |
| How many children did they have | What were their names? |
| Where did they live? | When and where did they die, and what was the cause of death? |
| Where were they buried? | |

Overwhelmed by the number of questions? You will need to focus.

- Select 1 individual or family at a time
- Select 1 question at a time.

Use your pedigree charts and family group sheets to help you identify the questions that need answers.

Create a "Research Plan".

- On one side you'll list which questions you want to answer
- On the other you'll list the steps you plan to take to obtain the answers.

Step 3: Search compiled and original records.

Before you can fill out the rest of your research plan, you'll need to figure out which information sources are likely to be best for answering your question.

Types of sources

Primary – created at the time of the event by someone who was involved.

Secondary – created much later than the event or by someone who was reading or interpreting the original source.

In the absence of primary sources, however, you may have to depend on secondary sources. Even when primary sources are available, using secondary sources first may speed up your ability to locate a primary source. It is often a good idea to locate research that has already been done by others. While it is possible that this research may contain errors, it may save you a great deal of time in locating the primary sources you need.

What kind of records do you look for?

Use a “Record Selection Table” which may be found on the FamilySearch research wiki.

Where do you find these records?

- Government office (request copies)
 - Archives
 - Department of Health and/or Vital Records
 - Clerk’s Office
 - Courts
- Churches (request copies)
- Cemeteries
- Online sources
- Repositories
 - Public libraries
 - Family History Centers
 - Family History Library (Salt Lake City, UT)

Always use a Research Log

- Record which information sources you have searched
- When you searched them
- What you found or did not find.

Step 4: Analyze and evaluate your findings.

Evaluate what you found

- Did it answer your question?
- Does it agree with the other facts you know?
- Does it point you in another direction?
- Does it suggest more questions?

If new information conflicts with existing information, you will have to decide which, if either, piece of information is more likely to be accurate.

- Is one from a primary source and the other from a secondary source?
- Is one from a more authoritative or believable source?

The more time you spend doing genealogical research, the more skillful you will become in deciding these difficult questions.

Step 5: Record and source your findings.

- Be sure to document your findings.
- Identify the source in such a way that others can easily find it.
- Incorporate the new information into your pedigree charts and family group sheets.
- Check this information against the information already in your pedigree charts and family group sheets to see if the new information makes sense.

Don't forget to share what you have learned with other family members.

What Now?

Go back to Step 1 and REPEAT the entire cycle again, asking yourself

- What more do I know now?
- What else do I need to learn?

Where to look

- FamilySearch.org – This is a free website sponsored by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It is accessible from any computer with internet access.
 - Indexed (searchable) record collections
 - Help with research how-to's (Get Help)
 - Research Assistance (talk to someone)
 - Getting Started
 - Learning Center (courses)
 - Research Wiki
- Cyndi's List (cyndislist.com) Links to genealogical research sites
- Google, Bing and other search engines. Search for genealogy sites, histories, etc.
- Salt Lake City Family History Library or local FamilySearch Library
 - Classes
 - Helpful staff
 - Research resources
 - Subscription web sites (Ancestry.com, FindMyPast.com)