

Miss Marge's Guide to Starting YOUR Family History Project

Get Your Feet Wet Without Getting In Over Your Head

THE FOUR-GENERATION PEDIGREE CHART

Your Family History Project starts with YOU, so your First Step involves sticking your big toe in the water, picking up a pencil and filling in the section of the Pedigree Chart for PERSON NUMBER ONE with YOUR information – YOUR full legal name as it appears on your birth certificate (no nicknames or A.K.A.s). If you're a woman, use your BIRTH NAME, and not your married name.

Time to add your birth date and birth place; these are the first of the three IMPORTANT LIFE EVENTS (birth, marriage, death) that you'll need to know about each of the fifteen names on your pedigree chart.

FIRST a word about DATES and PLACES, and the standard way to write down the information. ALWAYS use “military” or “European” style when writing down dates, i.e., 25 Jul 1964, and not 7/25/64. ALWAYS include the full locality of each event – example “Burien, King, Washington”. (Yes, counties are important, and you should get into the habit of including them in all locality information. Don't know the county? Use Google to find out! Be sure to spell out the names of states, too.)

With each Important Life Event entered on the Pedigree Chart, you should list a SOURCE or PROOF for the correctness of that information; could you PROVE this fact in a court of law? “I was there” or “My Momma done told me” really isn't PROOF (actually these are more like “clues”), but “a certified copy of my birth certificate in my possession” IS proof!

A HELPFUL HINT – in filling out the chart, if you can PROVE a name, date or place, enter it on the chart IN INK. If the information is hearsay, or if you're not sure, or if you can't PROVE the information, USE PENCIL. (Odds are, you'll need to change the information as you research, not to mention changing your definition of the word “proof”!) Of course, if you don't KNOW a name or date or locality, leave space on the chart so that you can write it in when you DO find it.

“WAIT! There's not much room on the Pedigree Chart to write down SOURCES!”, you might be thinking. Use a piece of notebook paper, stapled to the back of the Chart to keep track of those important citations. “Source for birth information for Stephanie Marie-Claire Rousseau – copy of birth certificate in baby book in possession of M.V.Reid” is one way to cite a source. This is also a good place to note any nicknames, A.K.A.s or name changes. You may find sources that use an “alternate spelling” for a surname; list those on the NOTES page.

And now the fun REALLY starts! Now we move on to the SECOND GENERATION!

On the Pedigree Chart, enter the information about your FATHER; he is PERSON NUMBER TWO, the start of your PATERNAL LINE. Remember to use PENCIL if you can't PROVE a name, date or place, and leave space for information you don't know - like MIDDLE NAME if all you know is the initial. Your MOTHER is PERSON NUMBER THREE – the start of your MATERNAL LINE (don't forget to use her BIRTH NAME!)

Time for the THIRD GENERATION – your GRANDPARENTS! Your PATERNAL GRANDPARENTS (your father's father and mother) are PERSONS NUMBER 4 and 5, your MATERNAL GRANDPARENTS (your mother's father and mother) are PERSONS NUMBER 6 and 7. Fill in as much as you can – use a pen ONLY if you can PROVE the information; use PENCIL if you can't; and leave space for information you're going to discover (after a bit of digging).

There IS room on that Pedigree Chart for (ta-DAH!) the FOURTH GENERATION - your four pairs of Great-Grandparents; fill in what you can. Don't be upset if there's lots of empty lines on the chart. Filling in those empty spaces will be GREAT fun!

FINDING INFORMATION and THE RESEARCH LOG

Miss Marge's Rule Number One for new researchers is this - “Sit on your wallet! Spend NO MONEY until you've exhausted all the FREE resources out there!”

First you need to check resources that might be in your own home right now – Bible records, old letters, photo albums, etc. can all provide information or at least clues as to where to look for that information. Talk to relatives who might have the information you need. Track down and interrogate cousins who may have inherited Family Stuff from THEIR parents.

Be sure to write down WHERE you found the information you're entering on the Pedigree Chart. You might staple a few MORE sheets of notebook paper to your Pedigree Chart to document these new sources OR you can start a RESEARCH LOG , with one page for each person on your pedigree chart.

Basically, a RESEARCH LOG is diary that helps you to remember where (and WHEN) you looked for information about, say, your great-grandmother. You tried to find her in the 1930 census with no success. Write that down (with the date and the resource(s) you checked, and a note that you came up empty-handed. You tried to find her in the Social Security Death Benefits Index (“S.S.D.I” for short) – no luck, until you remembered that the SSDI is one of the few major resources that lists a woman by the name she was known by at the time of her death, JACKPOT! Not only did you find her date of death, but also her date of birth! (Be careful about any locality

information given by the SSDI; usually the place named is where the last Social Security benefits check was sent, and not necessarily the place where she actually died.)

The RESEARCH LOG can also include a TO-DO list for each person on your pedigree chart – on Great-Grandmother's sheet you might make a note that you need her middle name, or the place where she was born, with a note as to the place(s) where you'd expect to find this information. Again, include the DATE when you added this “TO-DO” to the Log.

Try FREE online searches for information about an individual. Even a simple Google search might turn up results you can use. RootsWeb and FamilySearch also have search engines that may find answers for you! These are FREE and available from home! Your Sno-Isle Library provides some nifty databases that card holders can access from home. In the library you can use the System's Ancestry.com subscription (for FREE); simply reserve a computer and ask at the Reference Desk how to log in and search. The local Family History Center also has a subscription to Ancestry.com and computers you can use for your search – again FREE to everyone!

IMPORTANT! Always bring a thumb drive to save documents you find at libraries, the Family History Center and other research locations. You might find a JACKPOT of information that could cost LOTS of money if you were to copy the whole file. Be sure that the thumb drive has some sort of ID tag on it, in case you leave it in the computer. (Voice of experience here, by the way!)

AND don't forget to write down WHERE and WHEN you found the information! Miss Marge's Rule Number Two for new researchers is this - “Genealogy without documentation is MYTHOLOGY” (and besides, if she ever finds out that you didn't cite sources, she will YELL at you, BIG TIME!)

Think of your PEDIGREE CHART as a Genealogy Research Road Map. Bring it with you when you visit the local libraries, archives, Family History Centers, etc. With a single glance, a librarian or research specialist can see what you know (and can prove), what you sort-of know and what you need to learn before you can move on to The Next Generation(s).

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