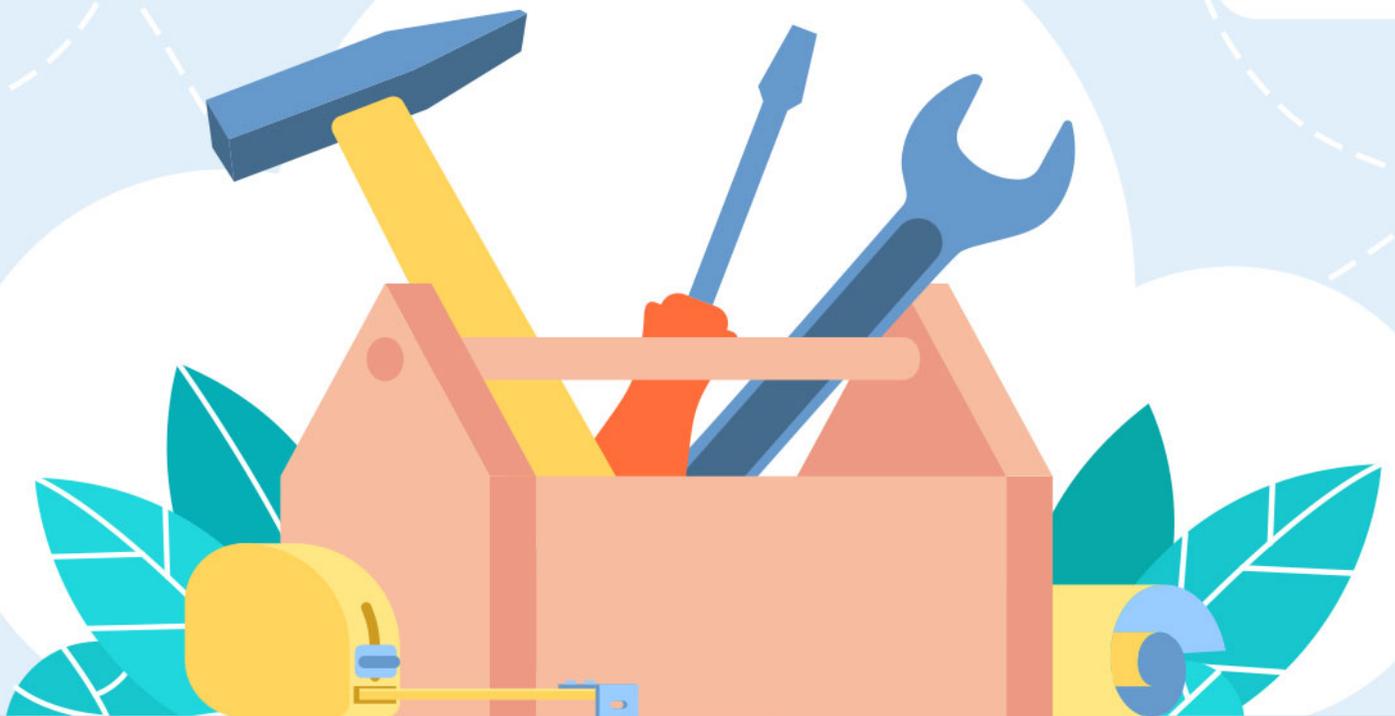


*familytree*

# Beginner Genealogy Starter Package



# Beginner's Guide to Genealogy

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How to Get Started with  
Your Family Research

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# 10 Steps to Start Building Your Family Tree

BY THE EDITORS OF FAMILY TREE MAGAZINE

[www.familytreemagazine.com/general-genealogy/10-steps-to-start](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/general-genealogy/10-steps-to-start)

## 1. GATHER WHAT YOU ALREADY KNOW ABOUT YOUR FAMILY.

Scour your basement, attic and closets (and those of your family members) and collect family records, old photos, letters, diaries, photocopies from family Bibles, even newspaper clippings.

## 2. TALK TO YOUR RELATIVES.

Ask your parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles about their memories. Don't ask just about facts and dates—get the stories of their growing up and of the ancestors they remember. Try to phrase questions with “why,” “how” and “what.” Our list of 20 genealogy interview questions [www.familytreemagazine.com/storytelling/interviewing/interview-questions](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/storytelling/interviewing/interview-questions) can get you started. See our tips for oral history interviewing [www.familytreemagazine.com/interviewing](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/interviewing) for more. Also email far-flung relatives to ask whether they have records that may be of help in your genealogy quest.

## 3. PUT IT ON PAPER.

Write down what you know so you can decide what you don't know yet. Start with the five-generation “pedigree” chart available in our Free Forms section [www.familytreemagazine.com/freeforms](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/freeforms).

## 4. FOCUS YOUR SEARCH.

What are the blanks in your family tree? Don't try to fill them in all at once—focus on someone from the most recent generation where your chart is missing information. Try to answer that “mystery” first, then work backward in time.



## 5. SEARCH THE INTERNET.

The Internet is a terrific place to find leads and share information—but don't expect to “find your whole family tree” online. See our Google search tips for genealogists [www.familytreemagazine.com/websites/improve-genealogy-google-searches](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/websites/improve-genealogy-google-searches). FamilySearch [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org) has the largest collection of free genealogy records, while Ancestry.com [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) subscribers can search that site's millions of records from home. Or you can see if your local library offers an Ancestry.com subscription free on its computers.

You can also search many of the biggest databases of names on the web with one click using One-Step Webpages by Stephen Morse [www.stevemorse.org](http://www.stevemorse.org).

## 6. EXPLORE SPECIFIC WEBSITES.

Once you've searched for the last names in your family, try websites specifically about your ethnic heritage or parts of the country where your relatives lived. You may even find websites about your family created by distant relatives researching the same family tree. A good place to start is our Best Websites section [www.family](http://www.family)

treemagazine.com/best-genealogy-websites>, which collects more than 100 great genealogy websites.

## 7. DISCOVER YOUR LOCAL FAMILY HISTORY CENTER.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has more than 4,000 Family History Centers <www.familysearch.org/centers/locations> where anyone can tap the world's largest collection of genealogical information. Using your local center, you can view microfilm of records such as the birth, marriage or death certificates of your ancestors. More than 2 million rolls of microfilmed records from all over the world are available. Compare the information in these sources with what you already know, fill in the blanks in your family tree, and look for clues to more answers to the puzzles of your past.

## 8. ORGANIZE YOUR NEW INFORMATION.

Enter your findings in family tree software programs or on paper charts. (Make sure you note your sources!) File photocopies and notes by family, geography or source so you can refer to them again. Decide what you want to focus on next.

## 9. PLAN YOUR NEXT STEP.

Once you've exhausted your family sources, the Internet and your Family History Center, you may want to travel to places your ancestors lived, to visit courthouses, churches, cemeteries and other places where old records are kept. This is also a rewarding way to walk in the footsteps of your ancestors and bring your heritage to life. You'll find that the quest to discover where you came from is fun, as exciting as a detective story, and never-ending.

## 10. SHARE YOUR RESEARCH.

Now that you've planted your family tree, show it off! Print family trees or start a family history website to share your research with loved ones. Looping others into your genealogy can help you add stories and family members to your research—and it's fun! ●

Last updated July 2022.

# How to Start Your Family Tree

- 1 Gather what you already know.**  
Scour your basement, attic and closets to collect family records, old photos, etc.
- 2 Talk to your relatives.**  
Ask your parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles about their memories.
- 3 Put it on paper.**  
Fill out a basic five-generation pedigree chart. You can download one for free on [familytreemagazine.com](http://familytreemagazine.com).
- 4 Focus your search.**  
Focus on someone from the most recent generation where your chart is missing information.
- 5 Search the Internet.**  
Begin with bigger databases; see if your local library offers an Ancestry.com subscription or others for free.
- 6 Explore specific websites.**  
Try websites specifically about your ethnic heritage or parts of the country where your relatives lived.
- 7 Discover your local Family History Center.**  
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has more than 4,000 Family History Centers around the world.
- 8 Organize your new information.**  
Enter your findings in family tree software programs or on paper charts.
- 9 Plan your next step.**
- 10 Share your research.**  
Print family trees or start a family history website to share your research with loved ones.

# COUNTING. COUSINS



How, exactly, are you related to the child of your great-great-grandmother's sister's son? We'll explain the steps to calculating cousinhood.

BY DIANE HADDAD

🐾 **EVER PLAY THE** “Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon” game? It involves linking famous actors and actresses to Kevin Bacon via movies they’ve appeared in together. George Clooney, for example, clocks in with a Bacon number of just 2: He appeared in *Hail, Caesar!* with Matthew Skomo, who was in *X-Men: First Class* with Kevin Bacon. Turns out just about everyone in Hollywood is six or fewer movies “removed” from Kevin Bacon. (Check it out at [oracleofbacon.org](http://oracleofbacon.org).) And supposedly, none of us is further than six connections from any one person on earth—even Kevin Bacon.

When it comes to cousinhood, the relationship possibilities are just as endless. Your number of grandparents doubles

with each generation. Count back 10 generations, and that’s 2,046 total ancestors, which means the cousin potential is exponential. You could have millions of them: fourth cousins, second cousins three times removed, tenth cousins twice removed ... we could go on. And with DNA testing, Facebook [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com), online family trees and message boards that connect you to new cousins every day, you’re bound to get curious about exactly how you’re related. Good thing we’re here with this guide on figuring out what kind of cousins you are, based on degrees of separation from shared ancestors. Who knows? Maybe you’ll even discover Kevin Bacon’s your kin.

## Starting simply

What makes someone a cousin? The simple fact that you share an ancestor with that person. But to understand the intricacies of cousin relationships, you have to get this: Your ancestors are only the people in your direct line: parents, grandparents, great-grandparents and so on. Your ancestors' siblings are aunts and uncles (no matter how many greats you add)—not ancestors.

Just about any other blood relative who isn't your sibling, ancestor, aunt or uncle is your cousin. To determine your degree of cousinhood—first, second, third, fourth—you need to identify the ancestor you share with your cousin, and how many generations separate each of you from that ancestor.

Your first cousin (sometimes called a full cousin, but usually just a cousin) is the child of your aunt or uncle. The most recent ancestor you and your first cousin share is your grandparent. You typically share 12.5 percent of your first cousin's DNA.

Your second cousins are the children of your parents' first cousins. Take a look at your family tree, and you'll see that you and your second cousins have the same great-grandparents. You typically share 3.125 percent of your second cousin's DNA. For third cousins, great-great-grandparents are the most recent common ancestor and you share .781 percent of your DNA. You get the picture.

Time for a pop quiz: What's the relationship between your granddaughter and your sister's grandson? And the answer is ... second cousins. The kids' most recent common ancestor is their great-grandparent (your parent).

## How far removed?

"I aced that one," you say, "but what about a removed cousin? Or a fourth cousin three times removed? What does that mean?"

A remove happens when two cousins have different numbers of generations back to their most recent common ancestor. One generation of difference equals one remove. First, count back the number of generations from each cousin to the common ancestor. The cousin with the lower number of generations determines the degree of cousinhood—first, second, third and so on. Then subtract the lower number of generations from the higher number to find out how many times removed the cousins are.



**TIP:** Remember that the shared DNA numbers shown in our chart are averages. Due to the random way DNA is inherited, it's possible you don't share any DNA with a given relative beyond about second cousins.

Take my son, Leo. He and my cousin Matt (son of my mom's sister) share my grandmother as their most recent common ancestor. My grandma is Matt's grandmother, too, but she's Leo's great-grandmother. Matt is just one generation away from their common ancestor, so he and Leo are first cousins. But Leo is two generations away from the common ancestor—making Leo and Matt first cousins once removed. They share about 6.25 percent of their DNA. Of course, the further removed a cousin gets, the less DNA they share, as you can see in the chart. You can be distantly related to long-deceased individuals through removes, too. For example, say you're fourth cousins three times removed with Warren G. Harding. (Because of the mind-boggling number of cousins you have, there's bound to be someone famous in your family tree.) That would mean your sixth-great-grandparents are his third-great-grandparents.

Anthropologists call the process of figuring out cousin relationships "collateral degree calculation" (don't worry, we won't spring that term on you again). Multiple removes and degrees of cousinhood can get complicated,

## Relative Surprises

Think you have unusual relatives? Genealogy makes strange bedfellows. Just consider these odd couples:

- **ELVIS PRESLEY** and **JIMMY CARTER** are sixth cousins once removed through Andreas Preslar and Antje Wells, who were married in May 1723.
- **MADONNA** and **CELINE DION** are 10th cousins once removed through Jean Guyon, an early settler of Quebec.
- **BARACK OBAMA** and **DICK CHENEY** are eighth cousins through Mareen Devall, a 17th century immigrant from France. **OBAMA** and **GEORGE W. BUSH** are 10th cousins once removed, linked by Samuel Hinkley of Cape Cod, who died in 1662.
- **GEORGE W. BUSH** and **HUGH HEFNER** are 11th cousins twice removed through Thomas Richards, who died about 1650.
- **HILLARY CLINTON** and **ANGELINA JOLIE** are ninth cousins twice removed through Jean Cusson, who died in St. Sulpice, Quebec, in 1718.
- **BEN AFFLECK** and his pal **MATT DAMON** are 10th cousins once removed through William Knowlton, an Ipswich, Mass., bricklayer who died in 1655.
- **PRINCE ALBERT OF MONACO** is seventh cousins with **NAPOLEON BONAPARTE** and 17th cousins with **TOM HANKS**.
- **BRITNEY SPEARS** and **JOHN EDWARDS** are seventh cousins three times removed through John Stovall, born in the early 1700s in Virginia.
- **DIANA, PRINCESS OF WALES**, and **SARAH PALIN** are 10th cousins. Their ninth great-grandfather, John Strong, was born in 1605.

but you don't have to be a scientist to get it right. The chart on the next page will help straighten out your cousin confusion; just follow the instructions for using it. For example, to figure out how you're related to your great-great-grandmother's sister's son, first determine the ancestor you share with him: your third-great-grandmother. Find her on the chart, then count down one generation for the sister and one more to the sis-ter's son. He's your first cousin three times removed.

## Double the fun

Double cousins are a special cousin category for the offspring of brothers- and sisters-in-law—for example, your sister weds your husband's brother. Instead of sharing one set of grandparents, double cousins share both sets of grandparents.

## Resources

- **Ancestor Search Cousin Relationship Calculator** <[www.searchforancestors.com/utility/cousincalculator.html](http://www.searchforancestors.com/utility/cousincalculator.html)>
- **DNA-explained.com: Why Are My Predicted Cousin Relationships Wrong?** <[dna-explained.com/2013/10/21/why-are-my-predicted-cousin-relationships-wrong/](http://dna-explained.com/2013/10/21/why-are-my-predicted-cousin-relationships-wrong/)>
- **DNA Matches: What to Do With All Your Genetic Fourth Cousins** <[lislouisecooke.com/2015/01/dna-matches-genetic-4th-cousins/](http://lislouisecooke.com/2015/01/dna-matches-genetic-4th-cousins/)>
- **Dozens of Cousins** by Lois Horowitz (Ten Speed Press)
- **The Family Tree Guide to DNA Testing and Genetic Genealogy** by Blaine T. Bettinger (Family Tree Books)
- **International Society of Genetic Genealogy Wiki: Autosomal DNA Statistics** <[isogg.org/wiki/Autosomal\\_DNA\\_statistics](http://isogg.org/wiki/Autosomal_DNA_statistics)>
- **iRoots.net Cousin Calculator** <[www.iroots.net/tools/cusncalc](http://www.iroots.net/tools/cusncalc)>
- **Kinship: It's All Relative**, 2nd edition by Jackie Smith Arnold (Genealogical Publishing Co.).
- **RelativeFinder** <[www.relativefinder.org](http://www.relativefinder.org)>

Your ancestors are only the people in your direct line — parents, grandparents, great-grandparents and so on.

As you might expect, double cousins have more DNA in common than typical first cousins—about 25 percent.

Despite how it sounds, a kissing cousin isn't a cousin you marry. Rather, it's any distant relative you know well enough to kiss hello at family gatherings. Now we're begging the question: How close a cousin is too close to wed? States have different laws governing consanguineous marriages (and we've heard all the jokes, so just stop right now). It's best to ask a lawyer about statutes for the state in question.

And while we're on the topic: Due to limited mobility in our ancestors' day, most of us have instances in our family trees of cousins who married, whether knowingly or unknowingly. That means you can be related to the same person in multiple ways.

Someone you're related to by marriage, rather than by blood, isn't your cousin. You might be in-laws, or your relationship might not have a name other than (we hope) good friends. You can read more about collateral degree calculation — oops, we mean family relationships—in *Dozens of Cousins* by Lois Horowitz (Ten Speed Press) and Jackie Smith Arnold's *Kinship: It's All Relative*, 2nd edition (Genealogical Publishing Co.). ■

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**DIANE HADDAD** is the editor of *Family Tree Magazine*. She has 20 first cousins and an unknown number of second cousins and beyond.

MORE  
ONLINE

- How to determine relationships with shared DNA matches <[familytreemagazine.com/dna/how-to-use-shared-dna-to-determine-relationships](http://familytreemagazine.com/dna/how-to-use-shared-dna-to-determine-relationships)>
- What is pedigree collapse? <[familytreemagazine.com/research/what-is-pedigree-collapse](http://familytreemagazine.com/research/what-is-pedigree-collapse)>
- How to use MyHeritage DNA matching <[familytreemagazine.com/article/how-to-use-myheritage-dna-matching](http://familytreemagazine.com/article/how-to-use-myheritage-dna-matching)>

- 10 ways to connect with distance cousins <[familytreemagazine.com/article/10-ways-to-find-cousins](http://familytreemagazine.com/article/10-ways-to-find-cousins)>
- Q&A: shared DNA with relatives <[familytreemagazine.com/article/now-what-counting-chromosomes](http://familytreemagazine.com/article/now-what-counting-chromosomes)>
- Finding cousins online <[familytreemagazine.com/article/the-cousin-connection](http://familytreemagazine.com/article/the-cousin-connection)>





# BUSTED!

We expose the truth behind  
10 genealogy falsehoods that  
could sabotage your family tree.

**BY JULIE CAHILL TARR**

🐾 **WAS YOUR GREAT-GRANDMA** a Cherokee princess? Mine too! And like lots of Americans, you probably have an immigrant ancestor whose surname was changed at Ellis Island. Oh, and your whole genealogy is awaiting you on the internet, right?

Wrong. Myths and misconceptions like these abound when it comes to genealogy. Some, like the last name changes, come from family lore and some we hear from other researchers. Anyone can fall victim to these myths because they're so often repeated and sound reasonable. Why wouldn't you believe

that your original Polish surname Tomaszewski was changed to Thomas by an immigration inspector at Ellis Island? It seems plausible. And of course not every historical record is on the web, but genealogy commercials seemingly would have you think you can find your complete family tree just by going online. And how cool is it that you descend from a Cherokee princess? Dear old Grandma wouldn't have made that up.

We hate to bust your bubble, but we'll do it anyway. See why 10 common genealogy myths are false and how to avoid falling for them.

## MYTH 1

### Surnames were changed at Ellis Island.

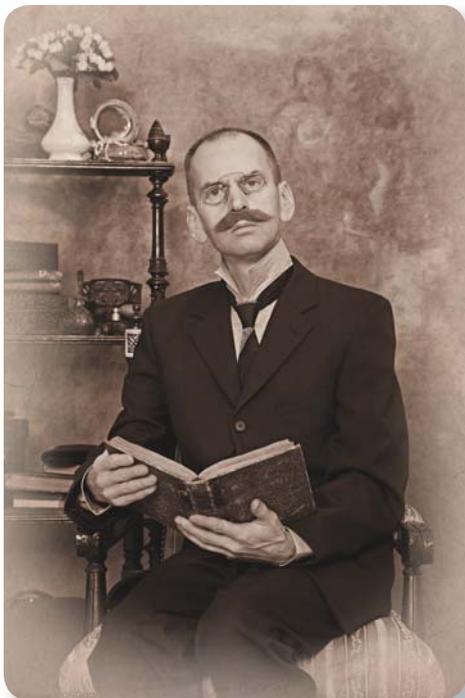
This often-repeated family story would have you believe that Ellis Island officials crossed off immigrants' names on passenger lists with abandon, scribbling in American-sounding substitutes. But in fact, those passenger lists were compiled at ports of departure as passengers bought their tickets. Officials at Ellis Island merely compared them to passengers' answers to interview questions, sometimes making notations on the lists. Misunderstandings weren't an issue: Ellis Island staffed interpreters fluent in dozens of languages.

Why the myth? It is true that immigrants' surnames did often change; however, the immigrants did so themselves. They may have "Americanized" their surnames (and often, given names) to blend in with their new surroundings, distance themselves from ethnic stereotypes and make their names easier for bosses and teachers to say. The Gaelic *Ó Murchadha* might become Murphy, or the German *Schwarz* might become Black, its English translation.

Genealogists encounter a broad variety of surname spellings. Sometimes record-keepers (including ships' clerks, who listed ticket-holders) wrote the name incorrectly; sometimes the ancestor provided a variant spelling. Keep an open mind and be on the lookout for these variants. Grandpa may



have always spelled his surname Smyth, but you might find it as Smith or Smythe in different records. The name at one time might've been Schmidt, especially if he was of Germanic descent. Download our free Surname Variant Chart form [familytreemagazine.com/info/surnamevariantchart](http://familytreemagazine.com/info/surnamevariantchart) to help you keep track of these variants and translations.



## MYTH 2

### It's in print. It must be true!

Sometimes you'll get lucky and find a compiled genealogy book on a particular family or come upon an ancestor mentioned in a county history. If you read genealogical journals, such as the National Genealogical Society's *NGS Quarterly*, you might discover a relative named in another researcher's case study.

But just because the information you find is in print doesn't mean it's true. Errors can creep in due to incomplete research, misinterpreted records or reliance on other inaccurate sources. As much as you want to believe this windfall of genealogical information, proceed with caution. Ask questions such as:

- Who is the author?
- When and where was the work published?
- Does the author cite the sources of the information?

Use the details in the book or journal as clues and thoroughly investigate them to verify the information in original records. If the author cites sources, try to review the sources yourself. Compare your findings to your existing research and draw your own conclusions. You very well may get the same answer, but you can be more confident in the conclusion if you've done the work yourself.

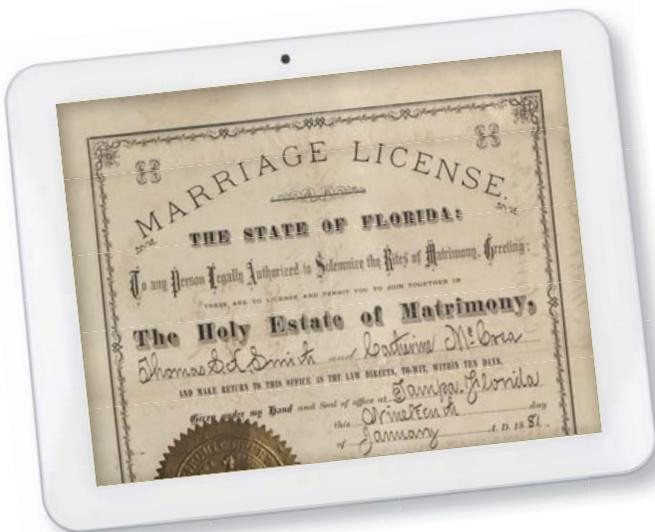
## MYTH 3

### All the records you need about your family history are online.

Genealogy information is more accessible than ever, thanks to the internet. Sites like Ancestry.com <[ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com)>, MyHeritage <[www.myheritage.com](http://www.myheritage.com)> and FamilySearch <[www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)> add new records every day. Anyone can share family photos with a blog or online tree. Still, the web offers only a fraction of historical records housed on paper and microfilm in libraries, archives, courthouses and other repositories.

You can find a lot about your family from websites. That includes building the foundation of your family tree from basic records with broad coverage, such as US censuses. Online vital, military and even court and church records can help you fill in details. Digitized newspaper websites such as GenealogyBank <[www.genealogybank.com](http://www.genealogybank.com)> let you search millions of pages at once.

But those online databases don't have every county's court records or every town's newspaper. In some cases, such as Ancestry.com's Civil War Pension Index: General Index to Pension Files, 1861-1934, the database gives you only indexed results, which you can use to track down the original record. Some entire record groups are offline, such as the vast majority of Civil War pension applications (a few are on Fold3 <[www.fold3.com](http://www.fold3.com)>; others must be ordered from the National Archives and Records Administration) and land entry case files of those who claimed federal land. Venturing out to a local library or historical society may get you access to microfilmed church registers, printed city directories, and records of businesses and organizations—not to mention the expertise of the librarian.



It's easy to assume a death date is correct when it's repeated in hundreds of family trees, but repetition doesn't turn a mistake into the truth.

## MYTH 4

### This is my ancestor, according to these 423 online trees.

Online trees are great tools for keeping track of your discoveries, and it's easy to expand branches with the automated "hints" you get on sites like Ancestry.com and MyHeritage. And when you see how many other trees include that same data or record—well, accepting that suggested person or record is a no-brainer, right?

Not so fast. No one independently verifies the trees on genealogy websites. Mistakes proliferate when tree owners accept hints that aren't good matches. It's easy to assume a death date is correct when it's repeated in hundreds of family trees, but repetition doesn't turn a mistake into the truth.

When you get a hint, check it out carefully. Examine the original record or the sources in the supposedly matching tree. Ask yourself if it makes sense. Remember that many people living in the same place could have the same name and be a similar age. If you're not 100 percent confident in the hint's correctness, set it aside for now. Increase your chances of getting accurate hints by including as much verified detail—names, places, family members' names—in your tree as possible, and see the January/February 2017 *Family Tree Magazine* <[shopfamilytree.com/family-tree-magazine-january-february-2017](http://shopfamilytree.com/family-tree-magazine-january-february-2017)> for help managing Ancestry.com hints.



**TIP:** You can order microfilmed records from the Family History Library (for a fee) and view them at your local branch FamilySearch Center. Start by searching the FamilySearch online catalog by place <[www.familysearch.org/catalog/search](http://www.familysearch.org/catalog/search)>, then click the online ordering system link.

## MYTH 5

### We descend from a Cherokee princess.

Stories of Indian ancestry—often, Cherokee—are common in the United States. By 2010, the Census Bureau reports, 819,105 Americans claimed at least one Cherokee ancestor. The stories have a basis in historical reality: The Cherokee and other Indians did intermarry with white settlers. Some Cherokee families (just over 7 percent by the mid-1830s) owned black slaves.

But we've got some bad news: Your great-grandma wasn't a Cherokee princess. The Cherokee never had royalty, nor did any American Indian tribe. Historians speculate the Indian princess myth arose because Pocahontas was touted as a princess in England, or because "princess" was used as a loose translation for *Ghigau*, a Cherokee title of honor for women. Romanticized notions of American Indians and our fascination with royalty help perpetuate the myth.

Your family may have American Indian heritage: In a 2014 analysis of 160,000 samples, 23andMe <[23andme.com](http://23andme.com)> estimated that about 2.7 percent of European-descended Americans and one in five African-Americans carries detectable Native American DNA. The only way to know is through research and DNA testing. If your ancestors lived in a place and time they would've had contact with Indians, consider taking a DNA test and consult the American Indian research guide in the October/November 2016 *Family Tree Magazine* <[shopfamilytree.com/family-tree-magazine-october-november-2016-print](http://shopfamilytree.com/family-tree-magazine-october-november-2016-print)>.



## MYTH 6

### The courthouse burned and the records are gone.

Have you ever called a county courthouse to ask about a will or deed, only to hear "The courthouse burned in the late 1800s and we have no records prior"? Courthouse fires, floods and other disasters weren't uncommon, especially in the South, where the Civil War raged. But the "no records survive" claim often isn't entirely true.

If you dig a little, you might find that some records were reconstructed. For example, after an 1884 riot and fire destroyed Cincinnati's courthouse, citizens showed up to re-register their deeds and marriages. Or you might discover that a harried or new courthouse employee didn't tell you that some records were spared, were recovered after the fact, or were stored off-site at the time. Or due to boundary changes, another county may be in possession of the records you need. The local genealogical society is a good source of such details about courthouse disasters. You can record your findings in our Burned County Records Inventory form <[familytreemagazine.com/info/burnedcountyrecordsinventory](http://familytreemagazine.com/info/burnedcountyrecordsinventory)>.

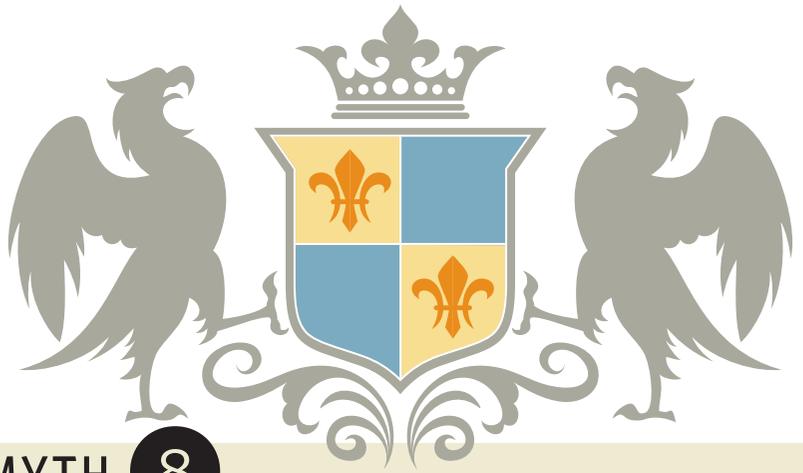
If the records you want were in fact lost, consider what other documents might hold the answers. For example, a church baptismal record might substitute for a birth register. Local newspapers might contain probate-related notices, digests of court proceedings, and lists of property transactions. Our Records Checklist <[familytreemagazine.com/article/recordreferences](http://familytreemagazine.com/article/recordreferences)> can help you brainstorm substitutes to seek.



## MYTH 7

### Same surname— must be a relative.

Whether it's President George Washington, *Mayflower* passenger John Alden or pop star John Legend, genealogists often hold out hope of finding a connection to a famous relative. But just because you have the same last name, it doesn't mean there's a relationship. So for all those Boones whose family lore claims Daniel is a cousin, you'll have to back it up with some research: Trace your family tree and the famous person's family tree (which already may be well-documented) and look for a connection. And remember: While it's fun to find the famous in your family tree, don't forget about your plain-Jane ancestors. Their role in your existence is just as worthy of your attention.



## MYTH 8

### Hey look, it's our family crest!

The term *crest* is often used interchangeably with *coat of arms*, but the crest is actually a part of the coat of arms. Neither, however, belongs to a surname. Instead, the right to use a coat of arms is granted to an individual and is passed down to the legal male-line descendants. Therefore, in order to claim a specific coat of arms, you must prove a male-line descent from a person listed on a country's heraldic register. (Note that many private, unofficial enterprises will design or register a "coat of arms" for you for a fee.) You can learn more on the website of the College of Arms, the heraldic authority for England, Wales and Northern Ireland <[www.college-of-arms.gov.uk](http://www.college-of-arms.gov.uk)>.



## MYTH 9

### Three brothers came to America ...

The story goes that three brothers (not four brothers, or two brothers and a sister) arrived in the United States, where one went north, one went south and one went west, giving rise to families with their surname across the country.

Of course, brothers (and sisters) often did immigrate at the same time, but rather than disperse themselves, families and neighbors from the old country tended to stick together in their new homeland. They were much more likely to settle the same area than to spread across the country. A similar story in your family merits careful research to determine if the immigrants in question were in fact related or just shared the same surname.

## MYTH 10

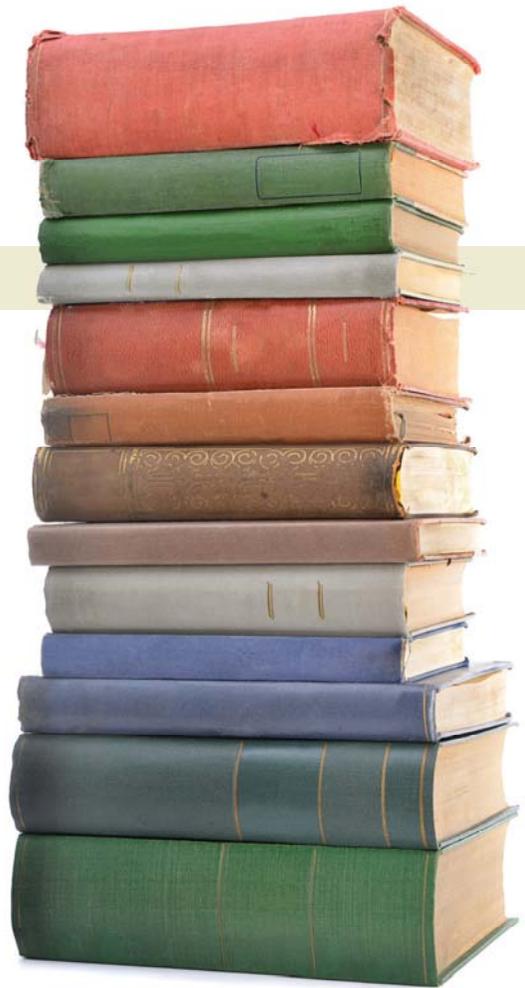
### Source citations are just for professionals.

Most genealogists are hobbyists, researching in their spare time to satisfy a personal desire to know their history. If you're doing genealogy for fun and don't plan to share your discoveries outside your family, is it really necessary to go through the tedium of citing sources used in your research?

The answer is yes, especially if you're interested in knowing your family's *true* story. Recording information about the sources of your genealogical conclusions is beneficial for several reasons:

- It'll keep you from scratching your head, trying to remember why your tree says Great-great-grandpa was born in 1852.
- It saves you time in trying to find a source again. Say, for example, you discover a different record that says your great-great-grandfather was born in 1855. You'll need to re-check your sources for his birth to determine whether to go with 1852 or 1855.
- It helps you evaluate the reliability of information you've gathered. A county history written long after the events it describes, for instance, is less likely to be accurate than a newspaper account written at the time of those events.

The tome *Evidence Explained* by Elizabeth Shown Mills (Genealogical Publishing Co.) is many a genealogist's citation-writing guidebook. Most nonprofessionals, though, won't need to craft formal citations. Focus instead on just recording the source information: title, author, publisher, website and database name (if applicable, with date of access), publication date and place, format of the version you used (book, microfilm, digital images, etc.), and page number. For a hard-to-find or one-of-a-kind source, also note the repository or relative's home where you found it. Your source information should allow you or someone else to easily find the source again.



Repetition in families and online keeps these myths front and center in American culture. But now you're armed with the truth. It's time to break it to Mom that Great-grandma wasn't a Cherokee princess. ■

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**JULIE CAHILL TARR** is a professional genealogist, writer and editor.

## MORE ONLINE

- Best websites for beginners  
<[familytreemagazine.com/article/25-best-genealogy-websites-for-beginners](http://familytreemagazine.com/article/25-best-genealogy-websites-for-beginners)>
- Seven surname research strategies  
<[familytreemagazine.com/article/all-about-surnames](http://familytreemagazine.com/article/all-about-surnames)>
- Evaluating online genealogy sources  
<[familytreemagazine.com/article/evaluating-online-sources](http://familytreemagazine.com/article/evaluating-online-sources)>

- Researching heraldic heritage  
<[familytreemagazine.com/article/unzipping-your-coat-of-arms](http://familytreemagazine.com/article/unzipping-your-coat-of-arms)>
- Searching Ellis Island with One-Step web pages  
<[familytreemagazine.com/article/stepping-up](http://familytreemagazine.com/article/stepping-up)>
- Finding famous ancestors  
<[familytreemagazine.com/article/almost-famous](http://familytreemagazine.com/article/almost-famous)>

# THE ROARING TWENTI

Celebrate the 20th anniversary of *Family Tree Magazine* with our 20 best timeless genealogy tips.

by THE EDITORS OF FAMILY TREE MAGAZINE



When *Family Tree Magazine* began in 2000, the world looked different. Christina Aguilera's "What a Girl Wants" topped the charts, and a gallon of gas cost "just" \$1.51. Google <[www.google.com](http://www.google.com)> was still a fledgling start-up, and Facebook <[www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)> just a glimmer in 16-year-old Mark Zuckerberg's eye.

More to the point: Billions of genealogy records had yet to be digitized at the turn of the millennium. Megawebsites Findmypast <[www.findmypast.com](http://www.findmypast.com)> and MyHeritage <[www.myheritage.com](http://www.myheritage.com)> were years from being founded, and DNA testing (still a young science) had limited utility for genealogists.

But that was about to change. Founding Editorial Director David A. Fryxell wasn't kidding when he wrote in the premiere issue of *Family Tree Magazine* that "It seems everybody in America has caught 'roots mania.'" Genealogy has continued to explode in popularity as online records databases continue to grow, and as social media and DNA testing make it easier than ever to discover and connect with your relatives.

They say with age comes wisdom. And though so many things have changed in the past 20 years, the core of good genealogy research has remained the same. Here's a list of 20 timeless family history tips to help you take your research into the new decade.



PHOTOGRAPH BY LORI PEDRICK; STYLING BY CHLOE BARCELOU; CAKE FROM EAT MORE CAKE (KEENE, NH); ARCHIVAL PHOTO: PICTORIAL PRESS LTD/ALAMY/STOCK PHOTO

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# Though so many things have changed in the past 20 years, the core of good genealogy research has remained the same.

## SEARCHING FOR FAMILY

### 1. Start with what you know.

Look around your home. You may be sitting on a treasure trove of family history. What objects or research have you inherited from other relatives? What family stories did you hear growing up? You'll need to validate family lore, but information passed down from generation to generation can give your research some direction.

### 2. Move backward in time.

Start with the most recent members of your family (you and your parents), then carefully document each generation as you work backward in time, one ancestor at a time. Strong

research needs to be built on a solid foundation—even if you're studying ancestors you've met in person.

This will keep you from making rash jumps in your family history or making false assumptions about your family's lineage. While it's exciting to think you might be related to someone famous, for example, you can't start with that famous person and work your way down the family tree. Rather, climb your family tree from the bottom up, sturdy limb by sturdy limb.

### 3. Make a plan.

For efficient, methodical research, sit down and consider your goals. Rather than jumping down a random research rabbit hole, consider what

questions about your ancestry you'd most like to answer.

Your goals might seem big and daunting. But once you've outlined them, you can figure out what specific tasks will help you attain them. The 31 entries here are good examples.

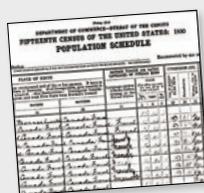
### 4. Ask for help.

You certainly don't have all the answers to your most pressing questions, and you're no less of a genealogist for asking others for assistance. By tapping into a network of family members and other genealogists, you can start to uncover new information and resources that you'd never have access to alone.

This can take many forms. Perhaps you reach out to relatives on Facebook <[www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)>, or set up an in-depth interview with a member of your family. Even distant relatives can have information on your ancestors, so

## The Genealogy Industry, 2000–2019

Genealogy has changed a lot in the past 20 years—and *Family Tree Magazine* has been here for it all. Here are some of the most important events that have taken place since our first issue in 2000.



The 1930 US census becomes available for researchers.

Findmypast, originally called [www.1837online.com](http://www.1837online.com), comes online as a database of UK vital records from the General Register Office.

2000

The first issue of *Family Tree Magazine* is published.



2001

Ancestry.com (then under the corporate name MyFamily.com) acquires RootsWeb. Later acquisitions include Heritage Makers (2005), Footnote/Fold3 (2010), 1000memories (2011), Archives.com (2012), GeneTree (2012) and Find A Grave (2013).

Family Tree DNA launches its first consumer Y-DNA and mtDNA tests.

2002

2003

The first version of the RootsMagic software debuts.

MyHeritage, then a software download, launches from the living room of CEO Gilad Japhet.

2004

don't be afraid to connect with even second and third cousins.

If you've hit a dead end, consider hiring a professional who specializes in that area of research. The Association of Professional Genealogists <[www.apgen.org](http://www.apgen.org)> and Legacy Tree Genealogists <[www.legacytree.com](http://www.legacytree.com)> each maintain databases of experts who might have the right know-how to scale your highest brick wall.

### 5. Study social history.

Your ancestor's birth and death dates are just the tip of the iceberg. Try to understand your ancestor's life and times. What were their towns and communities like? What dangers did they face? What social, economic, religious or political forces impacted the decisions they made? How did their lives compare to those of their peers? Understanding these factors will help you put your ancestor's life in context, and help you better



connect with the generations that came before you.

Sources such as city directories and Sanborn fire insurance maps can help you piece together the physical layout of your ancestor's neighborhood. And city or county histories, scholarly texts and even well-researched historical fiction provide solid information. Newspapers, too, can give you insight on the day-to-day goings-on in your ancestor's community.

Also take care to study how borders changed over time as well, as jurisdictional changes will affect where your ancestors' records are held today.

The Atlas of Historical Geography of the United States <[dsl.richmond.edu/historicalatlas](http://dsl.richmond.edu/historicalatlas)> and the US Geological Survey <[www.usgs.gov/products/maps/overview](http://www.usgs.gov/products/maps/overview)> are good resources to get you started.

### 6. Research your ancestors' networks.

Your ancestor was part of a wider community, and researching your ancestor's friends, neighbors, extended family members and coworkers can lead to information about your ancestor himself. Study your ancestor's "clusters" (social networks, such as friends and neighbors) and "collateral relatives" (i.e., your non-direct-line relatives, such as your ancestor's siblings, cousins, aunts and uncles). We discussed cluster and collateral research in depth in our December 2019 issue <[www.familytreemagazine.com/premium/cluster-collateral-research](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/premium/cluster-collateral-research)>.



23andme offers the first direct-to-consumer autosomal DNA test for genealogy.

The Family History Research Wiki comes online.

2005

The UK version of "Who Do You Think You Are?" premieres on the BBC.

2006

2007



The first episode of the Family Tree Podcast premieres.

2008

2009

Family Tree University offers its first genealogy webinars. Online courses follow in May 2010.



## USING RECORDS

### 7. Seek original records.

Indexes, whether paper or digital, don't always tell the full story. Spelling mistakes and transcription errors can make a mess of even the most precise keyword search, so you'll sometimes need to turn to record images to even *find* your ancestor. Many online records collections include images of the original record, or you can request documents from an archive for a nominal fee.

Viewing original records can also generate new leads in your research. By looking at the pages immediately before and after your ancestor's listing in a census, for example, you might find friends, extended family members or neighbors whose information can help you grow your family tree.

### 8. Evaluate your sources.

Not all resources are created equal.

When and how a record was created (especially in relation to the event it's documenting) can drastically affect the reliability of the information you find in it. Ask yourself when and by whom a record was made.

In general, records created by people closer to an event (both in time and in relationship) are more reliable than those that weren't. For example, tombstones (created shortly after a person's death) are somewhat reliable resources for death information. But death certificates—which were created within a couple days of a person's death and generally required a witness who was often a close friend or relative of the deceased—are even more reliable than tombstones.

This advice rings even truer as family trees become more interconnected online. When you're reviewing another user's family tree profile for an ancestor, consider where the data there comes from, and how

reliable those sources are. If the person has only cited other people's family trees (or hasn't cited his sources at all), take the information there with a grain of salt.

### 9. Watch for data errors and impossibilities.

We've already mentioned index mistakes, but other, less obvious errors can damage your family tree. As you work, make sure the data you find makes sense. Were parents born *before* their children? (And, conversely, were mothers alive when their children were born?) Flag any data that doesn't line up. And, using your social history knowledge, determine if your ancestor's actions make sense given his age and the time and place he lived in.

We've collected more common genealogy errors <[www.familytreemagazine.com/premium/5-common-genealogy-errors](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/premium/5-common-genealogy-errors)> and "illnesses" <[A horizontal timeline from 2010 to 2014 with various genealogy events marked by vertical lines and text boxes. The timeline is divided into years: 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014. Events are connected to the timeline by thin lines.

- 2010:\*\* The US version of "Who Do You Think You Are?" premieres on NBC.
- 2011:\*\* GEDmatch is founded.
- 2011:\*\* Family Tree DNA first offers its Family Finder autosomal DNA test.
- 2011:\*\* The first RootsTech conference is held in Salt Lake City, Utah.
- 2012:\*\* "Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates, Jr." premieres on PBS.
- 2012:\*\* MyHeritage acquires WorldVitalRecords.com.
- 2012:\*\* AncestryDNA launches, accelerating the autosomal DNA test boom.
- 2013:\*\* The 1940 US census becomes available to researchers.
- 2013:\*\* MyHeritage acquires Geni.com.
- 2013:\*\* Ancestry.com launches Newspapers.com as a separate service.
- 2014:\*\* "Genealogy Roadshow" debuts on PBS.
- 2014:\*\* FamilySearch opens its Family Tree to the public.
- 2014:\*\* Findmypast acquires Mocavo.com.

Logos for Geni and findmypast are also present in the diagram.](http://www.familytree</a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

magazine.com/premium/family-tree-remedies>, plus how to avoid and remedy them.

**10. Use records as stepping-stones.**

Critically examine your ancestors' records to find clues to other documents they may appear in. Census records, for example, can contain multiple breadcrumbs that lead to other resources:

- Country of origin (passenger lists)
- Date of naturalization (passenger lists, declarations of intent, certificates of naturalization)
- Military service (draft cards, service records, pension documents)
- Number of years married (marriage banns, marriage certificates)
- Occupation (occupational records)

And, of course, your ancestor's stated age in a census record gives you a clue about birth year, as does birthplace.

**11. Expand your definition of "records."**

We spend a lot of time talking about census records and birth, marriage and death certificates. But your ancestors may have been recorded in a wide variety of less frequently used documents.

Keep an open mind when deciding which documents to research. Though sometimes harder to access and understand, court and land records can reveal fascinating details about your ancestor's life. Your ancestor may also have been recorded in

even more obscure sources, such as society minutes, school report cards or newspaper gossip columns. Courtney Henderson's article on records for finding female ancestors (read here) contains a handful of these lesser-known sources.



RootsTech and the Federation of Genealogical Societies (FGS) cohost their 2015 conferences in Salt Lake City.



LivingDNA begins offering its DNA test.



FamilySearch discontinues its microfilm lending service, vowing to publish all its microfilmed records online by the end of 2020.



NGS and FGS announce their intent to merge.

**2015**

Ancestry.com sells the Family Tree Maker desktop software to MacKiev, who launches a new version of the program in 2018.

**2016**

MyHeritage launches its own autosomal DNA test.

**2017**

California law enforcement use DNA information from GEDmatch to identify a suspect in the long-cold Golden State Killer case.

**2018**



MyHeritage hosts its first MyHeritage LIVE conference in Oslo, Norway.

**2019**

RootsTech holds its first international conference in London.

## ORGANIZING YOUR GENEALOGY

### 12. Develop a consistent filing system.

As you accumulate files, records and other data over the years, it can be easy to feel like you're drowning in stuff. By adopting a standard filing system, you can bring order to all that family history chaos and find your files quicker and more easily. The *Ahnentafel* (German for "ancestor table") system is one possibility, as it uses a simple, standard method to assign a number to each ancestor. Genealogist Kimberly Powell wrote a helpful summary of *Ahnentafel* for ThoughtCo <[www.thoughtco.com/ahnentafel-numbering-system-explained-1420744](http://www.thoughtco.com/ahnentafel-numbering-system-explained-1420744)>.

### 13. Cite everything.

Though time-consuming, source citations lend more credibility to your research. They don't have to be overly complicated, but they should contain enough information about a source that you or another researcher can easily trace the data back to its source. *Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace* by Elizabeth Shown Mills (Genealogical Publishing Co.) will get you started.

### 14. Back it up.

The evolution of digital tech doesn't mean your documents are safer than they used to be. If anything, your hard-earned research is even more at risk now from file formats becoming outdated and hard drives crashing—in addition to the fires, floods and other natural disasters that also threaten your physical papers.

Set aside some time to regularly back up your genealogy data, and make sure you've backed it up in multiple places. For example, in addition to having your files on your desktop, also back them up on an external



hard drive, in paper format and in a cloud storage service such as Dropbox <[www.dropbox.com](http://www.dropbox.com)>.

### 15. Store heirlooms and documents safely.

No amount of scanning can digitize treasured heirlooms—Grandpa's watch, your mother's wedding dress or a beloved childhood toy. These items require special care to minimize age-related damage.

In general, you want to keep heirlooms, papers and other keepsakes in a dry, climate-controlled room, away from direct sunlight and stored using acid-free boxes and paper. Our experts (such as Denise May Levenick, the Family Curator) have written extensively on how to best preserve a variety of heirlooms throughout the years; see here for Denise's tips on saving baby artifacts.

## APPLYING YOUR RESEARCH

### 16. Share your stories.

You're not just finding names and dates in your research—you're also uncovering stories. Find ways of sharing these stories with loved ones, who might be drawn in by their ancestors' trials and tribulations in a way they never would be by data alone.

Consider blogging about your ancestors, or even just sharing anecdotes or snippets of research on social media. More ambitious writers might even consider putting together a narrative biography of their family's story. Richard Campbell, author of *Writing Your Legacy: The Step-by-Step Guide to Crafting Your Life Story* (Writer's Digest Books) shares some tips here.

### 17. Turn your research into gifts.

Another way to share your findings and involve living family members is to create gifts out of your research. You can print and distribute family trees or beloved family photos, or put your data together in a photo book <[www.familytreemagazine.com/premium/creating-a-photo-book-the-5-elements-to-include](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/premium/creating-a-photo-book-the-5-elements-to-include)>.

### 18. Celebrate your heritage.

Once you've studied your ancestors and ethnic heritage, get in touch with your roots! This can be as simple as trying a recipe from the old country or as involved as joining a heritage-focused society, such as the Society for German Genealogy in Eastern Europe <[www.sggee.org](http://www.sggee.org)> or the Order Sons and Daughters of Italy <[www.osia.org](http://www.osia.org)>.

You can also practice family traditions or take part in ethnicity-focused festivals, such as Oktoberfest or activities highlighted by the Association of Scottish Games and Festivals <[www.asgf.org](http://www.asgf.org)>. Planning a family reunion (read here) can also help you get in touch with your relatives—both living and deceased.

### 19. Keep learning.

You may be out of school, but that doesn't mean you have to stop learning! Read books on researching in your ancestor's area, and take advantage of online education opportunities. Libraries and genealogical societies, such as Brigham Young

University <[fh.lib.byu.edu/classes-and-webinars](http://fh.lib.byu.edu/classes-and-webinars)> offer educational programming on various genealogical topics, as does FamilySearch through its Learning Center <[www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Classes\\_in\\_the\\_Learning\\_Center](http://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Classes_in_the_Learning_Center)> and Research Wiki <[www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Main\\_Page](http://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Main_Page)>.

You can also take advantage of live-streamed genealogy conference sessions, such as those from RootsTech <[www.rootstech.org/video-archive](http://www.rootstech.org/video-archive)> and MyHeritage LIVE <[blog.myheritage.com/2019/09/myheritage-live-2019-lectures-now-online](http://blog.myheritage.com/2019/09/myheritage-live-2019-lectures-now-online)>.

At Family Tree University <[www.familytreemagazine.com/university](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/university)>, we have dozens of self-paced online genealogy courses written and instructed by experts, plus on-demand webinars that will give you the best tools for growing your family tree.

## 20. Embrace new tools.

Where would genealogy be today if we hadn't adopted the tools ushered in by the internet revolution? Online family trees, DNA testing, social media—all developments that changed family history research forever, but also disrupted “business as usual” for genealogists.

Keep an open mind toward new resources for researching and sharing your ancestry as they become available. While not all will stick—Google Plus comes to mind—new genealogy tech can dramatically cut your research time and make it easier than ever to save and share your findings.

The annual RootsTech conference <[www.rootstech.org](http://www.rootstech.org)> in Salt Lake City highlights some of the best new genealogy tools each year. And, of course, you can keep reading *Family Tree Magazine*, where we'll continue sharing the best genealogy advice and resources into this new decade. ●

## The Future of Genealogy

As anyone who's gone shopping for jetpacks lately knows, predicting the future is a crapshoot. When we founded *Family Tree Magazine* 20 years ago, we never could have predicted home DNA testing or family trees that you could view on a phone. Nonetheless, here are some educated guesses about what the *next* 20 years hold for genealogy:

- The **1950 and 1960 US federal censuses** will be released in 2022 and 2032, respectively. Though still useful for genealogy, census details began to shrink in 1950, with only 20 questions for the full population. The 1960 “short form” collected only five questions: relationship to head of household, age, sex, race and marital status.
- We'll likely see **increasing digitization of records**, with: FamilySearch completing scanning its microfilm; Findmypast partnering with US Catholic archives; and Chronicling America continuing newspaper digitization. Beyond censuses and vital records, look for less-familiar land, probate, church and military records. Also expect more access to online records for those with Eastern European and Asian ancestries, as digitization projects reach the extant records from those parts of the world.
- **Microfilm readers gather dust.** Ditto for sources on paper.
- **Privacy and budget concerns** will crimp state and local archives' hitherto robust digitization efforts—especially of vital records.
- **Artificial intelligence** will build possible family trees based on DNA matches, following the leads of Ancestry.com (ThruLines) and MyHeritage (AutoClusters).
- Expect a **shakeout in the DNA market**, as saturation and disappointing results (“I'm half-Italian. Now what?”) take a toll.
- **Genealogy will continue to go global**, with international conferences (RootsTech London, MyHeritage LIVE) and the beyond-US branding of MyHeritage and Findmypast.
- Genealogy will go more **mobile**, with roots on your wrist and eyeglasses.
- **Genealogy software will continue to decline** in favor of online family trees, which can integrate with others' trees, records and DNA-match searches.
- Look for **increasing concentration in the genealogy business**, with major players snapping up smaller services and launching brand extensions. One of today's giants could even fold or merge. (“Impossible,” you say? Who would have thought 10 years ago that Family Tree Maker would be bought and even briefly discontinued?)
- **Amateur, homegrown genealogy websites will dwindle** or migrate to social media, as hosting costs, hassles and ubiquitous hacking weigh heavily.
- **Digital assistants** join in on genealogy: “Alexa, show me my Smith family tree.” “Hey Siri, when was Great-grandpa Jones born?”

—David. A Fryxell

# 25 Best Genealogy Websites for Beginners

BY SUNNY JANE MORTON

<[www.familytreemagazine.com/websites/25-best-genealogy-websites-for-beginners](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/websites/25-best-genealogy-websites-for-beginners)>

## If you're just starting

to research your family history, you need a search strategy. There are so many places to go for online genealogy records and websites to learn about your heritage. You want resources you can find online that are the most current, richest with ancestral information and the easiest to use. Our list of 25 beginner-friendly websites will get you started.

Don't worry—you don't need all 25 of them! We've broken them down into several categories, and in some you may only need to pick one. For example, to begin with, choose just one family tree-building website and DNA testing company. Then choose what sounds most interesting or relevant to you from your options for learning online, exploring regional and ethnic resources, and digging into beginner-friendly newspaper and tombstone records.

Keep this list handy, because at some point, the websites you're using may run out of answers for you. That's when you'll come back here and look for another. Even those that seem similar often have very different records, trees, or tutorials that might supply just the thing you're looking for next.

## WEBSITES FOR BUILDING YOUR FAMILY TREE

### Ancestry.com

<[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)>

This powerful subscription website is home to more than 30 billion old records, 100 million family trees and more than 20 million DNA profiles. Be sure to check out Ancestry Academy <[www.ancestryacademy.com/browse](http://www.ancestryacademy.com/browse)>

and Ancestry's YouTube channel <[www.youtube.com/c/Ancestrycom](http://www.youtube.com/c/Ancestrycom)> for beginner-friendly tutorials. Many US libraries offer Ancestry Library Edition free to patrons.

### Archives.com

<[www.archives.com](http://www.archives.com)>

This is a budget-friendly, scaled-down version of Ancestry.com, its owner. The core historical record collections are for the United States, so this may be a good option for beginning researchers who believe their families have been in the United States for several generations.

### FamilySearch

<[www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)>

The world's best all-free genealogy website, with more than 10 billion global, name-searchable records and billions of additional ones to page through. Learn research skills with the Research Wiki (under the Search tab). The Search > Catalog tab takes you to the most extensive genealogy library catalog in the world. Join the world's biggest shared family tree—or just mine it for information about your ancestors. The modest learning curve is well worth the effort.



## Findmypast

<[www.findmypast.com](http://www.findmypast.com)>

If you have roots in England, Scotland, Ireland or Wales, consider subscribing to gain access to millions of parish records, censuses, military and criminal records, and millions of British and Irish newspapers. Under the Help menu, explore the Getting Started section. DNA tests offered through Findmypast offer especially detailed geographic origins reports within Britain and Ireland.

## MyHeritage

<[www.myheritage.com](http://www.myheritage.com)>

If you have more recent immigrant origins or are especially interested in finding overseas cousins, consider subscribing to MyHeritage, home to more than 17 billion historical records and DNA testing. This Israeli website is strongest for continental Europe, Scandinavian countries and Jewish research. You can pay just for family tree-building tools or historical record access or combine them.

## WEBSITES FOR DNA TESTS

### 23andMe

<[www.23andme.com](http://www.23andme.com)>

Best known for its health reports, 23andMe also has an enormous pool of DNA testers: over 10 million. This makes it a great place to look for DNA matches (relatives) who may know something about your origins that you don't. It doesn't have as many tools to help reconstruct your family tree using DNA as AncestryDNA or MyHeritage DNA, but its genetically-oriented Family Tree is unique and helpful.

### AncestryDNA

<[www.ancestry.com/dna](http://www.ancestry.com/dna)>

More than 15 million people have taken DNA tests here, making it a prime place to connect with genetic relatives. Powerful tools help users compare their family trees with each other and figure out how they might be related. The proprietary Genetic Communities help reveal ancestral migration patterns.

### Family Tree DNA

<[www.familytreedna.com](http://www.familytreedna.com)>

This DNA testing company offers more than the standard autosomal DNA test provided by others. Customers can also choose various levels of YDNA testing,

to look at paternal-line ancestry (for men only), and mtDNA testing, to look at deep maternal ancestry (both women and men can take this test). Join different kinds of DNA projects to compare your DNA with others of the same geographic, cultural or surname origin.

## Living DNA

<[www.livingdna.com](http://www.livingdna.com)>

The newest of the major genetic genealogy companies, this one is best known for offering the most detailed breakdown for ancestral origins in Britain and Ireland. It doesn't yet have as robust a customer base as the others (limiting your options for finding DNA matches) or robust tools for determining the nature of relationships to genetic matches.

## MyHeritage

<[www.myheritage.com/dna](http://www.myheritage.com/dna)>

Marketed widely in Europe, this DNA testing company may be a good option if you're looking for DNA matches who may still live in your ancestral homeland. Online tools help testers compare their family trees and even provide theories about how they may be related.

## WEBSITES FOR LEARNING MORE ABOUT GENEALOGY

### Cyndi's List

<[www.cyndislist.com](http://www.cyndislist.com)>

Consider Cyndi Ingle's free site your table of contents for online genealogy. You'll find lists of sites dedicated to researching particular places, types of records, ethnic and religious groups, and more. Check out the Beginner's category <[www.cyndislist.com/beginners](http://www.cyndislist.com/beginners)> for guides and tips just for newbies. But also watch for topics you're interested in, like military research or DNA.

### Family Tree Magazine

<[www.familytreemagazine.com](http://www.familytreemagazine.com)>

Our own website offers abundant tools and how-to's for beginners. Under Free Resources <[www.familytreemagazine.com/free-genealogy-resources](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/free-genealogy-resources)>, find downloadable forms, ebooks, cheat sheets, our podcast and more. The cheat sheets can be especially helpful for beginners: don't miss our Genealogy Essentials downloads, Record References, ethnic research aids and top online genealogy tricks. Join our Website VIP membership for access to articles on many topics for beginners and beyond or take an online class from one of our experts.

## Google

<[www.google.com](http://www.google.com)>

Clues about your ancestors' lives may be as close as your next Google search. In addition to the ability to search for names and places, Google offers several genealogy-friendly tools. Google Translate <[translate.google.com](http://translate.google.com)> helps you translate text and websites into or out of English. Google Books <[books.google.com](http://books.google.com)> includes an online library of out-of-print resources such as local histories and compiled genealogies. Google Maps <[www.google.com/maps](http://www.google.com/maps)> and Google Earth <[earth.google.com/web](http://earth.google.com/web)> help you locate ancestral addresses and virtually visit them.

## ThoughtCo

<[www.thoughtco.com](http://www.thoughtco.com)>

Click the free site's Humanities tab, then History & Culture > Genealogy to dive into dozens of free how-to articles covering genealogy research basics, online searching, and sharing and preserving the past. You won't do actual research on this site, but you'll learn a lot. Because each article leads to more detailed and related articles on the same site, it's easy to lose track of what you've read. Refer back frequently to the main topics tabs (Basics, Surnames, Genealogy Fun and Vital Records Around the World) if you want to read systematically through everything offered.

## Your DNA Guide

<[www.yourdnaguide.com](http://www.yourdnaguide.com)>

A hands-on, try-this-now approach to finding answers from DNA testing—whether you've tested already or not. Under Learn, find easy-reading introductions to specific questions you can ask your DNA, such as ethnicity and geographical origins; finding biological relatives; and identifying unknown ancestors on your family tree.

## WEBSITES FOR EXPLORING REGIONAL AND ETHNIC RESOURCES

### AfriGeneas

<[www.afrigeneas.com](http://www.afrigeneas.com)>

Providing education and resources for those researching African-American roots, this unique site hosts regular opportunities for users to communicate with one another. Start with the Beginner's Guide under

the Records tab, then search marriage, death, surname and slave data databases under the same tab. Browse the Forums and Resources tabs to learn about African American newspapers, family reunions, Caribbean research and more. Under Chat, find opportunities to socialize with and learn from other researchers.

*Editor's note: As of July 2022, the AfriGeneas website appears to be having technical difficulties. You can access some of the website's advice by visiting its Facebook page.*

### Irish Genealogy

<[www.irishgenealogy.ie/en](http://www.irishgenealogy.ie/en)>

An online research portal run by the Irish government's Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. Search General Record Office holdings for historical birth, non-Catholic marriage and death records. Under the Research tab, find a Getting Started guide and a description of available Irish records.

### JewishGen

<[www.jewishgen.org](http://www.jewishgen.org)>

Make this your first stop for tracing Jewish roots. Under the Get Started tab, choose First Timer for an intro to Jewish research and the site. Free tutorials and paid classes are available. Search databases of Jewish surnames, family trees, towns, Holocaust victims and burials. Contribute your data to the centralized "family tree of the Jewish people."

### New England Historic Genealogical Society's American Ancestors

<[www.americanancestors.org](http://www.americanancestors.org)>

Start exploring your New England roots at this website, run by the region's premier research facility. Its collection of 1.4 billion online records does include national and international records, but its core strength is unique documents and educational materials dating back to British colonial times.

## WEBSITES FOR BEGINNER-FRIENDLY RECORDS

### BillionGraves

<[www.billiongraves.com](http://www.billiongraves.com)>

Search an enormous, free GPS-tagged database of tombstone images, or upload your own with the companion app. Users can add personal history information to individual photos and link them to other tombstone images.

Subscribers can access premium features, including cemetery maps showing plot locations, enhanced GPS mapping and alerts for your previous searches.

### **Chronicling America**

<[chroniclingamerica.loc.gov](http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov)>

The Library of Congress' portal to historical newspapers has two important areas of content: digitized newspaper pages (1777–1963)—and a comprehensive index to all known newspapers published in the United States and where to find them today. Check back frequently for new content. To learn more about using the site, including what's on it and what's not, click on the Help section.

### **Find a Grave**

<[www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com)>

Dig up ancestral burial information from millions of free tombstone images here. Search by an individual or cemetery name. Users are encouraged to upload additional tombstone photos and submit biographical information for memorial pages. You can even create virtual cemeteries to connect loved ones buried in different places.

### **Fold3**

<[www.fold3.com](http://www.fold3.com)>

This is the go-to source for digitized US military records from the Revolutionary War forward. Using the Help link (which you can access without a login), learn basic finding strategies and how to add ancestral memorials or even organize a gallery of family content. This section may help you decide whether to subscribe, so you can search and see a lot of records that used to be accessible only through the National Archives.

### **GenealogyBank**

<[www.genealogybank.com](http://www.genealogybank.com)>

GenealogyBank is home to more than 13,000 big-city and small-town newspaper titles; the site claims 95% are exclusive to their site. Search results are labeled as historical or modern obituaries, marriage notices, immigration records, and the like, making it easier to find what you're looking for. Scroll to the bottom of the site for tutorials on researching various ethnicities and a portal to 260 million obituaries.

### **NewspaperArchive**

<[www.newspaperarchive.com](http://www.newspaperarchive.com)>

Access more than 120 million digitized newspaper pages dating to 1607. The site is easy on the eye and easy to navigate. Browse newspapers by state and city (and for other countries), or enter names and other keywords along with desired dates and locations. Click on Help to take tutorials on using the site.

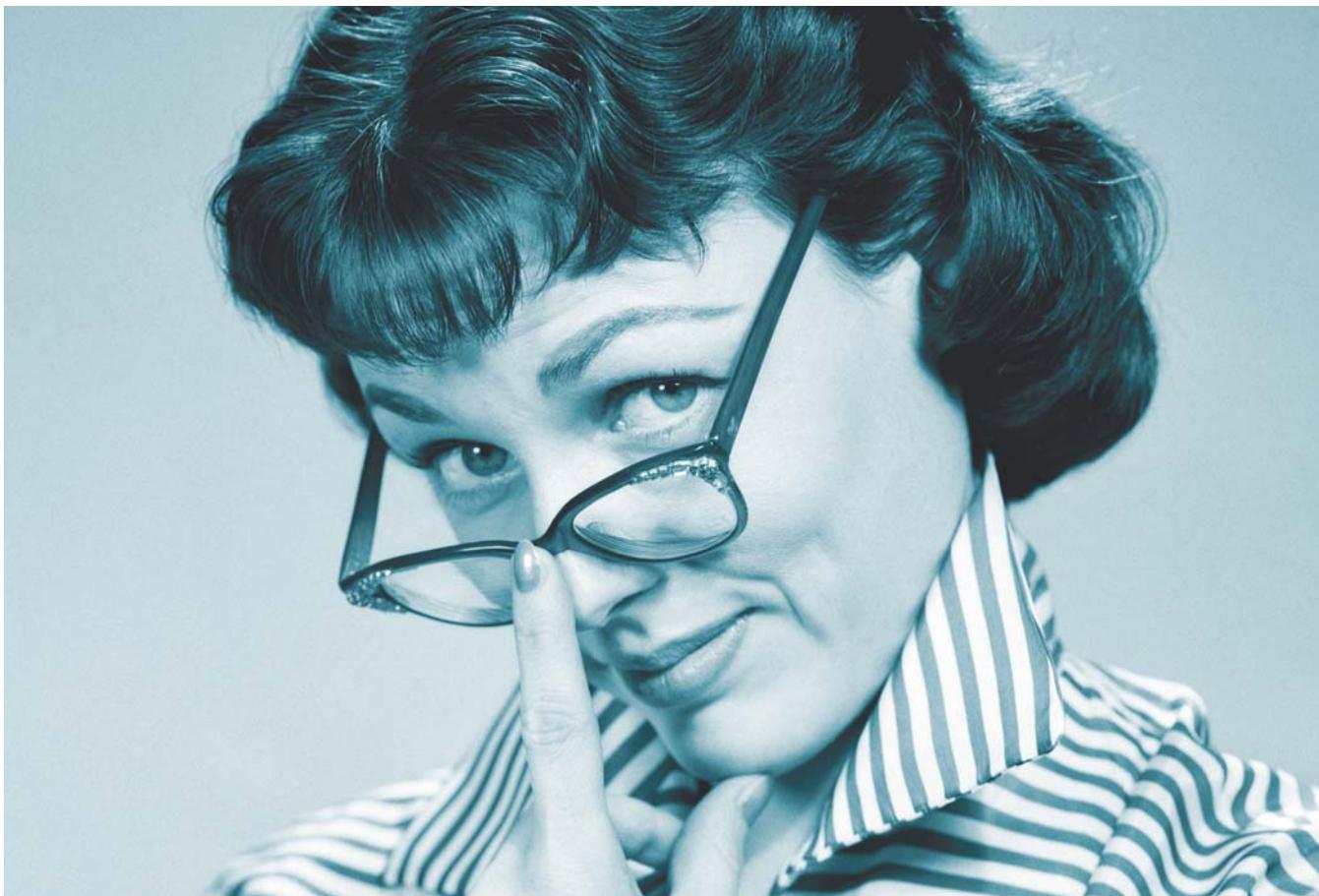
### **Newspapers.com**

<[www.newspapers.com](http://www.newspapers.com)>

This subscription website is home to more than 750 million digitized newspaper images: more than 21,000 newspapers dating back to the 1700s. A bundled subscription with sister site Ancestry.com decreases the cost and allows users to easily attach virtual news clippings to ancestral profiles in their Ancestry.com family trees. Scroll down to the Help link, then click the Get Started box for beginner-friendly videos and other tutorials (no subscription required). ●

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Debrocke/ClassicStock/Archive Photos/Getty Images

# Should You **Take the Hint?**

Hints in your online family tree make it easy to find new genealogy records about your ancestors. But are those records about the right folks? Our answers to 12 common questions will help you make the right call.

BY SUNNY JANE MORTON

🍃 **WHEN MY FAVORITE** genealogy websites first started sending me automated hints for records that might match the people in my online tree, I thrilled at each email. “Hi, Sunny, you have five new hints in your Armstrong family tree.” “Sunny, we’ve found new hints for your ancestors.” “Sunny Morton, you’ve got Record Matches!”

New hints still perk me up, especially those relating to my most mysterious ancestors. After all, millions of new records come online every week at Ancestry.com <[ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com)>, FamilySearch <[www.familysearch.org](https://www.familysearch.org)>, Findmypast <[www.findmypast.com](https://www.findmypast.com)> and MyHeritage <[www.myheritage.com](https://www.myheritage.com)>. Not every suggestion leads to a find about my family, of course. But any one of them holds the potential to help clear up confusing cousin connections or even add new relatives to my tree.

But to mine the full potential of hinting tools—and correctly determine when they *don’t* match your ancestors—you’ll need to understand how they work. We’ve gathered a dozen common hinting questions along with answers from experts at each of the four big genealogy and family tree websites. You’ll also find *my* hints for using *their* hints to add branches to your family tree.

## 1 What exactly are hints?

“We take the information we have in our database and we compare it to whatever information you’ve entered in your tree, and we search to see if we can find things that look like matches,” explains Ancestry.com Corporate Genealogist Crista Cowan (also known as the Barefoot Genealogist) in an online tutorial.

When you have hints in your family tree on Ancestry.com, FamilySearch, Findmypast or MyHeritage, messages or icons appear in relatives’ profiles and on their thumbnail images in the family tree view.

■ **ANCESTRY.COM:** This site’s hints icon, the green leaf, used to shake when you had a hint, but it doesn’t anymore.

■ **FAMILYSEARCH:** Record Hints on the FamilySearch Family Tree appear as a blue icon next to a person’s entry. Clicking on the blue icon brings up a hint list. You can then click links to the hints to review them.

■ **MYHERITAGE:** Here, you may see both Record Matches (brown document icons), which give hints from genealogy records; or Smart Matches (green icons), which give hints from other members’ trees.

■ **FINDMYPAST:** Hints on this site appear as orange numbers (corresponding to the number of hints) on a person in your family tree.

When you click a hint icon, the site shows you a record or someone else’s family tree that it thinks is a match to your relative. How does it decide? Hinting tools run complex comparisons to determine whether a record is a good match to your relative’s profile. “There’s a tremendous amount of weighting of scores and artificial intelligence to mimic the way a genealogist would think,” says Robert Kehrer, senior product manager at FamilySearch. The sites add up overall

scores for each potential record match. The highest-scoring records show up as hints.

“Matching” is the term MyHeritage uses for its hinting technology, and Chief Genealogist Officer Daniel Horowitz calls it a time-saver. “If I’d like to search for a certain person, I might need to run multiple searches, taking into account variations on the name, different places they lived, even language variations. I could lose precious time running searches again and again and again, when Matching would quickly pull me to the right record.”

## 2 How can I get hints?

You can get record hints from a website only if you’ve put your family tree on that site. After all, the hinting system needs something to compare its records with.

FamilySearch is free to all users, and all those who participate in FamilySearch’s community Family Tree have access to their record hints. Hints may point to record images hosted on FamilySearch or at another website, which may require a subscription to view the full result or record image.

At the other three websites, free guest users may see a list of record hints along with some basic information. But to see and evaluate all transcribed data or images, you’ll need the right subscription.

Unfortunately, hinting doesn’t work for the library editions of Ancestry.com, Findmypast or MyHeritage. Library versions are designed for multiple users, so you can’t use the library’s account to log in and pull up your family tree. “We encourage users in a library to register and build their own trees with a free [Findmypast] guest account,” says Myko Clelland, partnership manager at Findmypast. “They

The websites' hinting tools run complex comparisons to determine whether a record matches your relative's profile.

can use the library access to view records without their own subscription, but then keep coming back [to their guest account] to work on their tree.”

Ask your public library if it offers an insitutional version of Ancestry.com, Findmypast or MyHeritage. The services also are available on the computers at local FamilySearch Centers; find one near you at <[www.familysearch.org/locations](http://www.familysearch.org/locations)>.

### 3 How are hint results different from search results?

Hints return different results from your own manual searches—and sometimes this is better. “With hinting, we can look at *every* piece of information about that person and one-hop [or immediate] relatives,” says Kehrer. “The more data you have, the higher the accuracy of what you return.”

But when you perform a search, “you put in the parameters and the search system matches these exactly or closely,” he explains. “The search is looking for *everything* you ask for.” A search actually gives a lower score to a record that’s missing some of the parameters you want. Let’s say you enter a full name, birth date, birthplace, death date and place, spouse’s name, both parents’ names, and where they lived in 1900. “No single record may have all that data. So with a search, the more you put in, the less you get,” Kehrer says.

### 4 What family tree data do hints use?

“We match against the core elements: names, birth dates, birth locations and immediate relations,” says Findmypast’s Clelland. “In census hinting, if someone is in a household with a number of people with the same names as their immediate family, they will be scored much higher for relevance and we’ll throw that [hint] to the front.”

FamilySearch hinting looks at your ancestors’ names, genders and all life events that include names and dates, along with the gender, birth, marriage and death information for their “one-hop” relatives (siblings and children). “We automatically include common name variants and any alternative names entered. These score slightly lower, but they still do well,” Kehrer says.

MyHeritage matches on similar parameters. Including information about an ancestor’s spouse, children, parents

and siblings makes matching more accurate, Horowitz says. “It also saves me the time of having to repeat searches for every member of that family.” This is because when you accept Record Matches for one relative, you also can attach information from the record to other relatives.

Name translations also show up in MyHeritage matches. These often prove useful when researching immigrants who used one version of a name in the “old country” and another in the new. MyHeritage is especially adept at translating names. “We have a technology that knows how to translate the name into Russian, Ukraine, Hebrew, Greek and English,” says Horowitz. “Name-matching relies on a combination of various ‘sounds-like’ and spelling variation algorithms, plus translation and synonyms dictionaries.”

### 5 What records are included as hints?

Hints don’t necessarily compare your tree to *all* the historical records on each site. Findmypast has the most limited hinting tool. “In Hints, we include censuses, the 1939 Register and all the records in our birth-marriage-death category, such as monumental inscriptions,” Clelland says. He adds that Findmypast is working on expanding the site’s hints.

At Ancestry.com, hints look at about the top 10 percent most widely used databases, Cowan says in her online tutorial. These are mostly censuses, city directories, WWI draft registration cards and other large databases. Fortunately, this top 10 percent “accounts for well over two-thirds—maybe close to three-quarters—of our records,” says Cowan.

FamilySearch also hints on select databases, Kehrer says. “Most of our 5.5 billion indexed records are included in hints. But there are a number of collections without much hintable data, like some military records or thin indexes with just a few fields in them. Relationships are really important to a



**TIP:** You can watch for hints using a free guest accounts at subscription websites where you have a family tree. Make notes at home and then explore those records—for free—using library editions of the sites.

# Hint, hint

Each family tree site has its own algorithm for determining whether a record or person matches your ancestor. Here, we'll show one way to evaluate a match in Ancestry.com. This Ancestry.com hint acceptance page shows information from the hinted record on the left, and data from the tree we're researching on the right.

- 1 Summary information is displayed at the top of this hinting screen. Consult it as you compare the hint to your tree.
  - 2 Ancestry.com automatically checks the boxes next to new information. If you save the record to your tree, this information will be incorporated unless you uncheck the boxes.
  - 3 Conflicting information is marked "Different." If you check the box next to this information, you can designate it as either preferred or alternate data for that field.
  - 4 Edit what's in your tree from this screen, if needed.
  - 5 Check this box to add details for another relative named in the
- record. His family tree profile will then be enabled on the right.
- 6 If you determine the record doesn't match the John A. Smithson in your tree, click Not a Match. Then either select the right matching person from your tree, or add John A. Smithson as a new relative.

**1** Children (7)

- JESSE WILBERT B: 1904
- QUINCY S SMITHSON B: 1907
- WYATT DONALD SMITHSON B: 1908
- MARY SMITHSON B: 1910

**DOLA DOLPHUS SMITHSON**

B: 28 JUN 1879 in , FAYETTE, WV, USA  
D: 6 SEP 1924 in LOOKOUT, , WV, USA

Parents

- JOHN ALDERSON SMITHSON 1838-1912
- SARAH FRANCES STILL 1837-1912

MARY ANN CLENDENIN B: 15 APR 1885 in MORRIS CREEK, KANAWHA, WV, USA

Add new information to your tree [Learn more](#) [Report Issues](#) **SAVE TO YOUR TREE** Cancel

**2** Dola Dolphus Smithson in the 1880 United States Federal Census

Name  Dola Dolphus Smithson

Birth  Date: Jun Abt 1879 **DIFFERENT** **3**  
 Place: West Virginia **DIFFERENT**

Residence **NEW**

- Date: 1880
- Place: Talcott, Summers, West Virginia, USA
- Description: Marital Status: Single; Relation to Head: Son

**4** DOLA DOLPHUS SMITHSON (1879-1924) in your tree: Jeremy White and Riser

Name  DOLA DOLPHUS SMITHSON

Birth  Date: 28 JUN 1879  
 Place: , FAYETTE, WV, USA

Residence **NEW**

- Date: 1880
- Place: Talcott, Summers, West Virginia, USA
- Description: Marital Status: Single; Relation to Head: Son

Parents of Dola Dolphus Smithson **6** Not a match?

**5**  John A. Smithson Add Father of Dola Dolphus Smithson

JOHN ALDERSON SMITHSON (1838-1912) in your tree: Jeremy White and Riser

## Accepting Help

Here's where you can find tutorials for accepting hints on the major genealogy websites:

- **Ancestry.com**  
<[www.youtube.com/watch?v=bsQp6RWjLg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bsQp6RWjLg)>
- **FamilySearch**  
<[www.familysearch.org/blog/en/record-hints](http://www.familysearch.org/blog/en/record-hints)>
- **Findmypast** <[www.findmypast.com/hints](http://www.findmypast.com/hints)>
- **MyHeritage Record Matches** <[helpcenter.myheritage.com/Research/Record-Matches](http://helpcenter.myheritage.com/Research/Record-Matches)>
- **MyHeritage Smart Matches**  
<[helpcenter.myheritage.com/Research/Smart-Matches](http://helpcenter.myheritage.com/Research/Smart-Matches)>

match [hinting] system, so if they don't state relationships we might not hint them."

MyHeritage bucks the trend in this category. "None of our records are excluded from matching," says Horowitz. Among these, he says, is an enormous collection of digitized books and uniquely, digitized newspaper pages hosted at the Library of Congress' [Chronicling America <chronicling.america.loc.gov>](http://chronicling.america.loc.gov) and at the National Library of Australia's Trove <[trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper](http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper)> newspaper site.

### 6 How accurate are record hints?

Hint accuracy varies by site and the type of record the hint links to. Cowan emphasizes that the hints on Ancestry.com are just that: hints. "They're not facts ... You know your family better than a computer does, and so we expect and hope that you will review those hints to determine whether it's really your person or not. That's why we give you the option to review them—and to ignore them."

Findmypast hasn't published any data on the accuracy of its hinting system. "I've found it to be very useful in finding 'strays' as servants in other households in places that I may not have thought to look," Clelland says. "And it's quite good at finding family units to give me a nice full spread of records."

Both FamilySearch and MyHeritage have aggressive standards for their matching technologies. "We want accuracy to be pretty high because we have a wide base of users with varied expertise," Kehrer says. "[At FamilySearch,] we set the bar at four- and five-star hints with 98 percent accuracy." This number may drop if you're searching on common names or in highly populated areas, or if your tree data is incorrect or sparse. FamilySearch hinting does take into consideration the commonality of names in certain times and places, though. "The hinting system is still smart enough to generate some good leads," he adds.

MyHeritage also claims its Record Matches and Smart Matches have an accuracy rate in the upper 90th percentile, based on user acceptance rates.

Hinting accuracy may decline for results found via optical character recognition (OCR) search of old print materials, such as documents in PDF format. Indexes for these databases are more error-prone because they're created by software that "reads" the old text (the tradeoff being that the software creates the index much more quickly than humans could). Examples of OCR-driven search results include Ancestry.com's city directories and MyHeritage's digitized books. OCR searches of historical newspapers are even less accurate, due to deteriorating print quality.

### 7 Do hints appear from other people's trees and DNA matches?

Ancestry.com and MyHeritage hint on both family trees and DNA matches. Be aware that on Ancestry.com, hints for person matches in Public Member Trees will include only profiles that have Ancestry.com sources attached. This means that the system doesn't show you potential matching profiles that don't have sources linked from Ancestry.com databases—even though they may have users' uploaded records or source notes added manually. (The same goes for search results from Public Member Trees.) Find more details in blogger Randy Seaver's post at <[www.geneamusings.com/2017/12/ancestry-member-trees-indexing-rules.html](http://www.geneamusings.com/2017/12/ancestry-member-trees-indexing-rules.html)>.

In addition to its own member trees, MyHeritage also searches for hints in family trees on Geni <[www.geni.com](http://www.geni.com)>, FamilySearch, WikiTree <[www.wikitree.com](http://www.wikitree.com)> and other sources. You'll need a Data subscription for MyHeritage to see details in public trees. If you've taken a DNA test with MyHeritage or Geni (or uploaded test results from another company to MyHeritage), you'll see hints for any surnames or ancestors that appear in both your tree and your match's tree. At MyHeritage, watch for Smart Matches.

In your AncestryDNA profile, watch for the little green leaf to indicate Shared Ancestor hints. Ancestry.com's Migrations timelines also give you hints about which ancestors may belong to that Migration.

FamilySearch doesn't offer DNA tests, and doesn't hint based on matches to people listed in others' FamilySearch trees. "User trees represent other users' conclusionary opinions and are not evidentiary sources providing stand-alone historical evidence," Kehrer explains. "Others' research can often give clues when you hit a brick wall, but usually contain lots of duplication across trees, highly variable accuracy and should be verified with document sources. In the future, FamilySearch hinting intends to present matches to limited very high quality-tree data."

As of 2018, Findmypast doesn't have searchable trees or DNA tests, so it doesn't hint on either.

Hinting accuracy may decline for results found via optical character recognition search of old print materials, such as newspapers.

## 8 How are new hints generated?

Not surprisingly, most new hints appear when a site first publishes a set of records and matches them to your ancestor. But you also initiate re-hinting when you update an ancestor's family tree profile with more (or more-accurate) details. At all four websites, after you've added to or updated your tree, new hints may appear nearly instantaneously.

Occasionally, new hints appear when a site's hinting algorithm itself has been improved. Clelland describes Findmypast's aggressive efforts to improve its fairly young and limited hinting tool. Horowitz says that MyHeritage is continually improving its matching algorithms. Kehrer at FamilySearch says its tool is "a fairly new piece of software and we are still improving both our precision and recall."

## 9 What are hints to "suggested records"?

Two websites generate additional record hints along the lines of, "If you like this record, you may also like these other records." MyHeritage calls this Record Detective. "It activates every time you go into a record and you scroll down to see the details," Horowitz says. "We infer you may be interested in similar records. So if you're looking for a birth certificate of your ancestor, which includes the names of their parents, we might show you a relevant article, census record or document of the parent listed. One record leads to more."

Ancestry.com's comparable tool is called Suggested Records, which also opens when you're reviewing the transcription of a record image. According to the Ancestry.com blog <[blogs.ancestry.com/ancestry/2010/09/16/find-more-success-with-suggested-records](https://blogs.ancestry.com/ancestry/2010/09/16/find-more-success-with-suggested-records)>, the site checks whether that

record has been saved to any family trees. If so, the site looks for other records attached to those same ancestral profiles and shows you any matches. Kehrer reports that FamilySearch plans to add a similar tool.

## 10 Can I review all my hints at once?

Yes. After signing in, here's how to do this at each site covered here:

- **ANCESTRY.COM:** Open a tree, click the down arrow next to the name of the tree and select All Hints.
- **FAMILYSEARCH:** On your homepage, you'll see a list of Suggestions for You, including hints to review for individual ancestors. Click Show More to see additional hints. This shows an endless list of hints you'll need to review individually.

- **FINDMYPAST:** After opening a tree, click the orange My Hints button.

- **MYHERITAGE:** Hover your mouse over the Discoveries tab. Select Matches by People (for hints sorted by ancestor) or Matches by Source (sorted by record collection). I avoid the Instant Discoveries hinting tool because its all-or-nothing acceptance process may add many people to my tree without the option for detailed review.

Ancestry.com's Cowan suggests *not* reviewing all hints at once, though. "I find that going through hints on the All Hints page means I make more mistakes, because they're out of context." Instead, when she's working on a particular family or person, she reaches for hints from her family tree overview page or from ancestral profiles. Having the person's dates, places and family members fresh in your mind are important when deciding whether to accept a hint.

## 11 How do I know if the hint is a match?

Follow these tried-and-true steps to determine whether record hints are on target.

- **LOOK FOR MULTIPLES.** In your list of hints, watch for more than one matching record from the same collection, such as the 1900 US census. It's possible your ancestor was listed twice, but it's more likely that multiple same-named people



**TIP:** FamilySearch's collection of digitized books isn't included in the site's hinting. Search that collection separately at <[books.familysearch.org](https://books.familysearch.org)> and manually enter any discoveries in your tree.

lived in that time and place. If you're not sure whether the hinted record is your ancestor's, look for hints to the same person in related records (such as earlier or later censuses). See if you can sort them out by identifying features such as an occupation or spouse's name.

■ **VIEW THE IMAGE.** Click on the hint to check the record image, if there is one. Transcribed data may be wrong or incomplete. I jot down all the details from the document in a notebook, in case the hinting tool doesn't capture them fully.

■ **COMPARE WITH YOUR TREE.** If a hint is promising, start the acceptance process to see a side-by-side comparison of information from the record and what's already in your tree. Ideally, you'll see agreement on multiple fields, especially any unusual names, tiny locales and specific dates. The more the record agrees with what you know, the more likely it pertains to your ancestor.

■ **WAIT AND SEE.** Feel free to reject or wait on any hints you're unsure about. You can always come back to them.

■ **ADD DETAILS INDIVIDUALLY.** I prefer to accept each piece of data individually, rather than using the single-checkbox option that takes everything from the matching record at once. This forces me to carefully review each piece of data for

errors. Be sure you've gathered all the data from the record, not just what was indexed. After accepting the hint, go back to your relative's profile and enter any information that didn't get captured from the record.

■ **EDIT NEW PEOPLE.** If you add a new person while accepting a hint, such as your great-granduncle's wife in the 1940 census, check the new person's name and edit if needed. The name that's automatically supplied will be taken from the record transcription, which might be a woman's married name (women in your tree should be listed with their maiden names). Or children might be added with a mistranscribed last name.

■ **GLEAN EVERY NAME.** Add information from the record to the tree profiles of every relative the record names. Hinting tools let you attach records to multiple people identified from your tree. But they may miss someone who isn't indexed or who isn't a first-degree relative of the person whose hint you're reviewing.

## MORE ONLINE

### @ Web Content

- 48 *Ancestry.com Search Tips* free e-book <[familytreemagazine.com/freebie/free-ancestry-search-tips](http://familytreemagazine.com/freebie/free-ancestry-search-tips)>
- Genealogy project management worksheet <[familytreemagazine.com/freebie/genealogy-project-management](http://familytreemagazine.com/freebie/genealogy-project-management)>
- Online database search tracker <[familytreemagazine.com/freebie/onlinedatabasesearchtracker](http://familytreemagazine.com/freebie/onlinedatabasesearchtracker)>

## 12 What if I don't have any hints—or I run out of them?

If people on your tree don't generate any hints, don't abandon your research. "It just means that we can't tell with a high degree of certainty if any particular record belongs to your ancestor," Findmypast's Clelland says. "You might want to look at the information you've provided in your tree. Either add more or make sure it's as accurate as possible." And you'll eventually run out of hints (at least for the time being) for even the most highly documented ancestor.

In either case, it's time to start running your own record searches, because hints don't hand-deliver every record on a site. "No hinting system will find everything," Kehrer says. "Users who want to find all the records for an ancestor should expect to search iteratively [repeatedly] using different name, place and date variants, wildcards and data combinations to find misindexed or data-poor documents."

Before you start searching, scan that ancestor's profile. Note any missing records: a census, marriage license or draft registration? What years in your ancestor timelines are sparsely documented? Prioritize your record searches to capture documents you're missing, and consider looking for annual record types such as city directories to fill gaps.

In the end, remember that record hints can give your research an energetic launch, and fuel it along the way as websites add records. But hints don't do everything for you—and the direction they point you in is sometimes wrong. Do what you would with any advice you're offered: determine its credibility and decide for yourself if it's a hint worth taking. ■

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**SUNNY JANE MORTON** is a contributing editor to *Family Tree Magazine*.



# WALK OF FAME

These blockbuster  
**101 Best Genealogy  
Websites** will leave you  
on the edge of your seat.

by DAVID A. FRYXELL



**familytree**  
MAGAZINE  
**101 BEST  
WEBSITES**  
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**Few cultural institutions** got hit harder by the pandemic than the cinema. But recent box office numbers suggest that Hollywood is making a comeback. *Spider-Man: No Way Home* late last year quickly became the third highest-grossing film in the United States, and the anticipation behind this summer's blockbusters (from *Top Gun: Maverick* to *Jurassic World: Dominion*) underscores how ready many are to escape to the theater.

The movies can inspire a craving for popcorn. But can they also inspire your genealogy research? Our annual list of the 101 Best Genealogy Websites is here to answer with an emphatic yes! Whether your family-history finds are shocking ("Luke, I am your father") or merely satisfying ("Auntie Em, there's no place like home"), these websites will help you click your way to stardom.

As usual, the honor-worthy sites here are mostly free unless noted otherwise with a dollar sign (\$). Those premium sites require a subscription or other payment to really get the most value from their content. Also as usual, we've marked sites that were not in last year's list with an asterisk (\*).

To make room for more of those new or returning genealogy sites, we've left a bunch of familiar social-media destinations on the cutting-room floor. We've also once again skipped sites annually singled out in our listing of 75 best state sites.

Enough housekeeping! Fire up the popcorn popper and bring out the Jujubes or Sno-Caps. Silence your cellphones and settle into your seats. Your family tree is ready for its close-up.

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## "BIG" GENEALOGY WEBSITES

### **Ancestry.com** \$

<[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)>

Everything's bigger at Ancestry.com, now totaling 30 billion records and 10,000 terabytes of data, including 200 million names newly culled from sister site Newspapers.com's marriage announcements and records from recently acquired Geneanet. Full global access to records runs \$300 per year, and you can add the records of fellow honorees Newspapers.com and Fold3 with the All Access membership (\$400/year). The AncestryDNA test (\$99, but often on sale) has refined its ethnicity estimates, with more than 1,500 genetic communities represented.

### **FamilySearch**

<[www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)>

Now accessible in 30 languages, this always-free site recently added 28 million records from 20th-century US military muster rolls. Drawing on the vast resources of the Family History

Library, FamilySearch ranges from macro resources such as censuses to micro-collections such as county children's home records.

### **Findmypast** \$

<[www.findmypast.com](http://www.findmypast.com)>

Recent interface improvements, including image thumbnails and viewing controls, make it even easier to access this subscription site (\$179/year for Ultimate access; \$99 for LivingDNA testing). Coverage is strongest for the British Isles—boosted by the addition of 10 million Scottish parish vital records—though US and Australian records have recently been augmented. For extra pay-per-view fees, the 1921 census of England and Wales is available here.

### **HeritageQuest Online**

<[www.heritagequestonline.com](http://www.heritagequestonline.com)>

You can't subscribe to this site, but your local library can. If it's thereby free to you, you can enjoy collections from partner Ancestry.com along with the original half-dozen databases from HeritageQuest.

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Editor's note: Some of the websites listed in this article have advertising or affiliate relationships with *Family Tree Magazine*. However, *Family Tree* neither offers nor accepts payment in exchange for placement on the list of the 101 Best Genealogy Websites; honorees are selected solely on merit by David A. Fryxell and the editorial staff of *Family Tree Magazine*.

### **MyHeritage** \$

[www.myheritage.com](http://www.myheritage.com)

MyHeritage's new photo tools and ancestor-animation feature (Deep Nostalgia) may have garnered most of the press in the past year, but you shouldn't overlook the site for its original tree-building prowess (5 billion entries). A rapid expansion of its database, now topping 12 billion records, powers email alerts when records match your trees. New additions include millions of French records from the recent acquisition of Filae. Full record access with unlimited trees costs \$299 per year; another \$79 buys DNA testing, plugging into 2,000-plus genetic groups.

## **US GENEALOGY WEBSITES**

### **AccessGenealogy**

[www.accessgenealogy.com](http://www.accessgenealogy.com)

Launched in 1999 as an online finding aid, this site has grown to a reported quarter-million links, plus its own collections (under "Databases"). Particularly strong on Native American records, AccessGenealogy claims to have "the largest collection of free genealogy for your United States research," with a sidebar at right that breaks out collections by state. Our November/December 2021 issue included a tutorial of the site, which you can watch a version of here [www.familytreemagazine.com/websites/access-genealogy-quick-tour](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/websites/access-genealogy-quick-tour).

### **ACPL Genealogy Center**

[acpl.lib.in.us/genealogy](http://acpl.lib.in.us/genealogy)

The nation's second-largest genealogy library, the Allen County Public Library in Fort Wayne, Ind., offers free collections of Native American, African American and military records; family Bibles; a surname file; and state resources from Indiana and beyond.

### **American Ancestors** \$

[www.americanancestors.org](http://www.americanancestors.org)

A must for anyone with New England ancestors, this subscription site (\$99.95 per year)

from the New England Historic Genealogical Society also ranges beyond its Yankee origins, with more than 1.4 billion names in 475-plus collections. The online gallery Ancestor Strong [ancestorstrong.americanancestors.org](http://ancestorstrong.americanancestors.org), new in 2021, offers free-to-explore features and user-submitted stories of plucky kin.

### **BYU—Idaho Western States Marriage Index**

[abish.byui.edu/specialcollections/western-states/search.cfm](http://abish.byui.edu/specialcollections/western-states/search.cfm)

Find your ancestors' nuptials in more than 913,000 marriage records for 12 Western states. Arizona, Idaho and Nevada are best represented.

### **Genealogical.com** \$

[www.genealogical.com](http://www.genealogical.com)

Tap nearly 70 years of genealogical expertise from the Genealogical Publishing Company, which has published more than 2,000 books ranging transcriptions of old records not available elsewhere to tomes that are standards in the field. An ePub subscription (\$99.95 per year) offers digital access to more than 740 titles—equivalent in value to \$35,000 of print editions.

### **Genealogy Trails**

[www.genealogytrails.com](http://www.genealogytrails.com)

Launched back in 2000 to transcribe Illinois records, this volunteer site now hosts data for every state plus nationwide finds such as *Fanning's Illustrated Gazetteer* from 1850, Trail of Tears data, military headstones, and even "chuckwagon" recipes that make use of pioneer-era ingredients.

### **Library of Congress**

[www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov)

Check the catalog for books about your ancestors or their hometowns; explore archived music and folk traditions; download historical photos; and map the past with Sanborn fire insurance maps. Other digital collections range from music sheets published by the A.P. Schmidt Company (1869–1958) archives to contemporary "zines."

### **National Archives and Records Administration**

[www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov)

Volunteer citizen archivists have made catalog pages and record collections from "the nation's



Read the online version of this list (complete with clickable links) at [www.familytreemagazine.com/best-genealogy-websites](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/best-genealogy-websites).



Children in front of a Texas movie theater, 1939

attic” easier to find—including the recently released 1950 census <[1950census.archives.gov](http://1950census.archives.gov)>. Here, order veterans’ service records, check out old maps and photos, research immigrant arrivals, search WWII enlistments and much more. Find the branch nearest to you at <[www.archives.gov/locations](http://www.archives.gov/locations)>, or roll up your sleeves and help as a volunteer <[www.archives.gov/citizen-archivist](http://www.archives.gov/citizen-archivist)>.

### New York Public Library Digital Collections

<[digitalcollections.nypl.org](http://digitalcollections.nypl.org)>  
This site is a “living database” with new materials added every day, featuring more than 913,000 items from the library’s collections: maps, photographs, manuscripts, videos and more.

### Reclaim the Records

<[www.reclaimtherecords.org](http://www.reclaimtherecords.org)>  
When government agencies try to limit access to vital and other records, this advocacy group steps in with freedom-of-information laws and open-data requests. You can find links to the group’s successes (representing some 30 million records, including a swath of New Jersey birth indexes) here.

### USGenWeb

<[www.usgenweb.org](http://www.usgenweb.org)>  
This volunteer site encompasses thousands of state and county sites, tombstone and obituaries project, and pension collections. (No wonder its home page features a “trophy wall” of past 101 Best Websites honors!)

## CEMETERY WEBSITES

### BillionGraves

<[www.billiongraves.com](http://www.billiongraves.com)>  
It’s free to search—or add to—this collection of cemetery data and photos, linked to GPS coordinates. Or upgrade for \$60 per year to search by family plots and nearby graves, plus get priority support.

### Find a Grave

<[www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com)>  
With more than 200 million volunteer-submitted transcriptions (most with photos), this is the place to start seeking your dearly departed. Search options include nicknames, and maiden names, and you can place virtual “flowers.”

### Interment.net

<[www.interment.net](http://www.interment.net)>  
Don’t overlook this collection of more than 25 million cemetery records, transcripts and burial registers, which draws on some unusual sources—fraternal groups, historical societies and governments—as well as volunteer contributions.

### Names in Stone \*

<[www.namesinstone.com](http://www.namesinstone.com)>  
Search by deceased ancestor or cemetery to get not only tombstone names but also the grave location; cemetery name, map and address; GPS coordinates; and even driving directions. Members of the soon-to-be-launched paid plan will get enhanced features, but basic searching is free.

### Nationwide Gravesite Locator

<[gravelocator.cem.va.gov](http://gravelocator.cem.va.gov)>

If your military ancestors were buried in VA (Department of Veterans Affairs) National Cemeteries, state veterans' cemeteries, or other US locations (such as those with government grave markers), you can find them here.

## HISTORICAL NEWSPAPER WEBSITES

### British Newspaper Archive \$

<[www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk](http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk)>

Get the news about your British ancestors in this collection of nearly 50 million pages from the 1700s onward. Explore for a month for about \$17, or subscribe for a year at just \$9 per month. A partnership with Findmypast aims to add 14 million more pages by 2023, with 1 million pages per year free to access.

### Chronicling America

<[chroniclingamerica.loc.gov](http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov)>

Thanks to the Library of Congress, you can access more than 19 million free digitized newspaper pages from across the nation, dating from 1777 to 1963.

### GenealogyBank \$

<[www.genealogybank.com](http://www.genealogybank.com)>

Can't find your family in other newspaper collections? Try this subscription site (regular rate: \$99.90 per year), which boasts that 95 percent of its titles aren't available elsewhere. In addition to 13,000-plus titles and 260 million obituaries,

subscribers get access to censuses, historical books and government publications.

### NewspaperArchive \* \$

<[www.newspaperarchive.com](http://www.newspaperarchive.com)>

Launched in 1999, this pioneer in online commercial newspaper archives has 16,000 titles and over 100 million obituaries. For \$139.90 per year or \$19.95 per month, you can search its holding including titles from every US state and 28 countries.

### Newspapers.com \$

<[www.newspapers.com](http://www.newspapers.com)>

Another Ancestry.com property, this site has a Basic subscription (\$44.95 for six months) that includes 210 million pages from 22,000 newspapers dating back to the 1700s. The Publishers Extra subscription (\$74.90 for six months) adds 530 million pages—many of them from more-recent newspapers—licensed from publishers.

### Newspaper Navigator \*

<[news-navigator.labs.loc.gov/search](http://news-navigator.labs.loc.gov/search)>

Another free newspaper search site from the Library of Congress, this "LC Labs" project serves up 1.5 million historical newspaper

tip

Many subscription websites offer free trials, which allow you to try a service without having to purchase a plan. (Think of these free trials as movie trailers!)

photos from 1900 through 1963. Search by keyword, and the AI “navigators” will return newspaper photos it deems related.

## MILITARY RECORDS WEBSITES

### American Battle Monuments Commission

<[www.abmc.gov](http://www.abmc.gov)>

More than 200,000 Americans who died in World War I or II are buried or otherwise memorialized at the commission’s overseas military cemeteries. Search them all here.

### Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System

<[www.nps.gov/civilwar/soldiers-and-sailors-database.htm](http://www.nps.gov/civilwar/soldiers-and-sailors-database.htm)>

This essential jumping-off point for finding ancestors who fought on either side in the Civil War covers 6.3 million soldiers from 44 states and territories. You’ll also find more than 4,000 unit histories, plus records of 18,000 African American Union sailors.

### Daughters of the American Revolution

<[www.dar.org](http://www.dar.org)>

Though the organization doesn’t offer military records per se, the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) opens its membership to descendants of those who fought for or otherwise supported the United States in the Revolutionary War. DAR offers more than 80,000 Bible records, its library catalog, back-issues of *American Spirit* magazine, and entries in the DAR Genealogical Research System (used to research connections to qualifying ancestors).

### Fold3 \$

<[www.fold3.com](http://www.fold3.com)>

Another Ancestry.com subscription-based property, Fold3 (\$79.95 per year) focuses mostly on military records, including Revolutionary War and War of 1812 pensions, Civil War records, and WWI and WWII draft registrations.

### Mexican War Soldiers & Sailors Database

<[www.nps.gov/paal/learn/historyculture/search-usmexwar.htm](http://www.nps.gov/paal/learn/historyculture/search-usmexwar.htm)>

Search more than 89,000 records from both sides of the overlooked Mexican-American War in this database from the National Park Service’s Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site.

### Stories Behind the Stars \*

<[www.storiesbehindthestars.org](http://www.storiesbehindthestars.org)>

This nonprofit initiative aims to compile and share the stories of the more than 400,000 US military who lost their lives in World War II.

## HISTORICAL MAP WEBSITES

### Arcanum Maps \*

<[maps.arcanum.com/en](http://maps.arcanum.com/en)>

This evolution of the Mapire site still specializes in historical maps of Europe, including country, city and land (cadastral) maps. You can even search for specific places on the old maps—no scrolling or squinting required.

### Atlas of Historical County Boundaries

<[www.newberry.org/atlas-historical-county-boundaries](http://www.newberry.org/atlas-historical-county-boundaries)>

Chicago’s Newberry Library offers the ultimate online guide to those frustrating county boundary changes that put your ancestors’ records in the “wrong” places. In maps and text, you’ll find complete data about the creation and subsequent changes in the size, shape and location of every US county.

### Atlas of the Historical Geography of the United States

<[dsl.richmond.edu/historicalatlas](http://dsl.richmond.edu/historicalatlas)>

This site takes a high-tech approach to Charles O. Paullin and John K. Wright’s classic 1932 atlas. Find nearly 700 colorful maps, many of which are digitally enhanced to show changes over time or easily access data.

### Bureau of Land Management: General Land Office Records

<[www.glorerecords.blm.gov](http://www.glorerecords.blm.gov)>

Uncle Sam serves up images of more than 5 million federal land title records issued between 1788 and the present, plus survey plats and field notes, land status records, and control document index records.

### David Rumsey Map Collection

<[www.davidrumsey.com](http://www.davidrumsey.com)>

With 18 interactive globes of Earth (plus a few of Mars and other celestial bodies) and 114,000 images browsable using its Luna viewer, this site that’s sprung from a Stanford University



collection is eye-popping. The online collection includes rare 16th- through 21st-century maps from around the world. See here for a tutorial.

### **Gazetteer of British Place Names**

<[gazetteer.org.uk](http://gazetteer.org.uk)>

This exhaustive place-name index to Great Britain contains over 280,000 entries. It lists the historical county and the main administrative areas in which each place lies, and even covers changing boundaries and matches postal codes to places.

### **Historic Map Works**

<[www.historicmapworks.com](http://www.historicmapworks.com)>

With more than 1.6 million searchable historic maps and images, this site lets you match historical maps with modern Google ones and search in old property maps and directories. Subscribers can use a premium viewing tool, but there's plenty here for free.

### **Meyers Gazetteer**

<[www.meyersgaz.org](http://www.meyersgaz.org)>

Track down kin who lived in the German Empire (1871 to 1918) with this comprehensive place-name database. Searching is a snap, with unlimited asterisk wildcards and no worries about diacritical marks.

### **US Geological Survey**

<[www.usgs.gov](http://www.usgs.gov)>

Where the heck is your ancestors' old stomping grounds of "West Thumb"? The USGS' Geographic Names Information System <[edits.nationalmap.gov/apps/gaz-domestic/public/search/names](http://edits.nationalmap.gov/apps/gaz-domestic/public/search/names)> knows. You can also put places on the map with satellite, topographic and geologic maps.

### **WorldMap**

<[worldmap.maps.arcgis.com/home](http://worldmap.maps.arcgis.com/home)>

This Harvard collaborative mapping project has expanded beyond its original application, Africa-Map, which traced the slave trade. Many include overlays such as ethnographic surveys, Wikipedia entries, historical maps and heritage sites.

## **FAMILY TREE AND SHARING WEBSITES**

### **AncientFaces \***

<[www.ancientfaces.com](http://www.ancientfaces.com)>

Launched in 2000, this family photo-sharing site has expanded to encompass collaborative biographies, which serve as sort of a Wikipedia entry for the not-necessarily-famous.

### **Geni**

<[www.geni.com](http://www.geni.com)>

Shared trees at this free site include more than 230 million profiles. Seamlessly collaborate on a single shared tree with as many family members as you like.

### **TribalPages**

<[www.tribalpages.com](http://www.tribalpages.com)>

Pick your own privacy level here; if you choose, only invited family members can view or update your tree. Create charts, publish and share family stories, and even send customized newsletters to your cousins. Basic trees are free; posting more than 1,000 photos and certain other features require a paid subscription.

### **WeRelate**

<[www.werelate.org](http://www.werelate.org)>

This collaborative tree "wiki," sponsored by the Foundation for On-Line Genealogy, has pages for some 3 million people. You can search it for genealogy clues whether or not you contribute.

### **WikiTree**

<[www.wikitree.com](http://www.wikitree.com)>

This ambitious effort to build a "single family tree" for the world now includes some 30 million profiles—more than 9 million with DNA test connections—edited by nearly 900,000 members from around the world.

## **IMMIGRATION WEBSITES**

### **Castle Garden**

<[www.castlegarden.org](http://www.castlegarden.org)>

Before there was Ellis Island, America's first immigration center welcomed 8 million passengers to the port of New York from 1855 to 1890. Check this database (which includes records from as early as 1820) to see if your ancestors were among them.



A Regal movie  
theater in South Side  
Chicago, 1941



### Cook County Clerk of the Circuit Court \*

<[services.cookcountyclerkofcourt.org/NR/faq.aspx](https://services.cookcountyclerkofcourt.org/NR/faq.aspx)>

Even if your Midwestern family didn't live in Cook County (home of the city of Chicago), they may have been naturalized there. Find out in this searchable database of more than 500,000 naturalization documents covering 1871 to 1929—primarily declarations of intention, which may be the only public record of an individual immigrant.

### Immigration to the United States, 1789–1930 \*

<[ocp.hul.harvard.edu/immigration](https://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/immigration)>

This expansive Harvard site documents the nation's immigration history—especially the 19th-century waves of immigrants—with more than 400,000 pages from 2,200 books, pamphlets and serials; 9,600 pages from manuscript and archival collections; and more than 7,800 photographs.

### The Statue of Liberty—Ellis Island Foundation

<[www.statueofliberty.org/ellis-island](https://www.statueofliberty.org/ellis-island)>

Skip the glossy home page and zip right to this main search form <[heritage.statueofliberty.org/passenger](https://heritage.statueofliberty.org/passenger)>, where you can look for ancestors among 65 million records of arrivals through the Port of New York.

## GENEALOGY NEWS WEBSITES AND BLOGS

### Cyndi's List

<[www.cyndislist.com](https://www.cyndislist.com)>

Cyndi Ingle has been scoping out and categorizing genealogy websites almost as long as there's been a web—more than 25 years. At last count, she was up to more than 318,000 links in 229 categories.

### Genealogy Gems

<[www.lisalouisecooke.com](https://www.lisalouisecooke.com)>

*Family Tree Magazine* contributor Lisa Louise Cooke will help break down your brick walls with her podcasts, how-to guides, articles and YouTube channel <[www.youtube.com/user/GenealogyGems](https://www.youtube.com/user/GenealogyGems)>.

### Genealogy Guys

<[www.genealogyguys.com](https://www.genealogyguys.com)>

Lend an ear to any of about 400 podcast episodes, or check out the blog posts, courses and webinars by George G. Morgan and Drew Smith.

### The Legal Genealogist

<[www.legalgenealogist.com](https://www.legalgenealogist.com)>

Find answers to your questions about copyright and old photos, DNA, record access, cemeteries and more at this site from Judy G. Russell, a “genealogist with a law degree.”

### RootsTech

<[www.familysearch.org/rootstech](https://www.familysearch.org/rootstech)>

Attend more than 1,500 sessions across 20-plus categories from this premier genealogy conference—all virtually. The latest additions include presentations from the all-digital March 2022 conference.

Children outside  
a movie theater  
in Pittsburgh, 1941



## GENEALOGY TECH TOOLS

### DeadFred \*

<[www.deadfred.com](http://www.deadfred.com)>

This genealogy photo archive has helped more than 3,000 people find pictures of their ancestors. It's free to search the archive of nearly 150,000 records representing 22,000 surnames, plus "mystery" pics. Paying members (\$19.95 per year) get various customization options and enhanced photo-posting.

### Family Tree Searcher \*

<[www.familytreesearcher.com](http://www.familytreesearcher.com)>

No need to search family trees at popular pedigree sites one at a time. Here you can check up to 10 sites, from Ancestry.com to WorldConnect <[wc.rootsweb.com](http://wc.rootsweb.com)>, by entering your ancestor's info just once. A manual search option adds hints and suggestions for all the linked sites.

### Guild of One-Name Studies \*

<[www.one-name.org](http://www.one-name.org)>

Since 1979, the guild has promoted the study of surnames and their variants. You can search more than 2,300 studies covering 8,000-plus surnames and find related historical and educational resources. Some projects now include DNA components, while others detail surname geographic distribution and origins.

### Internet Archive

<[www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org)>

Digital discoveries await here, including old books, family and local histories, and media of all types. Or check the "Wayback Machine,"

which searches the history of over 673 billion pages on the internet.

### One-Step Webpages

<[www.stevemorse.org](http://www.stevemorse.org)>

Steve Morse has figured out how to perform "one-step" deep dives into immigration records, census records (including 1950 enumeration districts) and vital records. He'll also guide you through the historical twists of calendars, foreign alphabets, old maps and more. Morse was a guest on the March 2022 episode of the Family Tree Podcast <[www.familytreemagazine.com/podcasts/preparing-for-the-1950-census-release](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/podcasts/preparing-for-the-1950-census-release)>.

### RootsPoint \* \$

<[www.rootspoint.com](http://www.rootspoint.com)>

This rapidly expanding digitization site features nearly 10,000 state and family histories, plus census, military and immigration records. Join for just \$9.99 per year, or try the site for a small fee.

### RootsWeb

<[home.rootsweb.ancestry.com](http://home.rootsweb.ancestry.com)>

Though it's gone through some changes since its acquisition by Ancestry.com, this volunteer site still has brick-wall-busting value in its hosted sites, transcribed records, how-to pages and WorldConnect family trees.

### Trello \*

<[www.trello.com](http://www.trello.com)>

This free online collaboration tool organizes projects and ideas into easy-to-navigate boards, lists and cards. See our guide for using it in your research <[www.familytreemagazine.com/organization/how-to-use-trello-for-genealogy](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/organization/how-to-use-trello-for-genealogy)>.

## WorldCat

<[www.worldcat.org](http://www.worldcat.org)>

Can't find that something special at your library? If a book is available pretty much anywhere in the world, you can track it down among the more than 2 billion items cataloged here—with details on the nearest library that has it.

## AFRICAN AMERICAN GENEALOGY WEBSITES

### Digital Library on American Slavery

<[dlas.uncg.edu](http://dlas.uncg.edu)>

This online archive houses records related to the 15 slave states plus Washington, DC, as well as a number of Northern states. You'll find information about more than 100,000 individuals in slave deeds and notices, race and slavery petitions, and more.

### Enslaved: Peoples of the Historical Slave Trade

<[www.enslaved.org](http://www.enslaved.org)>

Learn about those who were enslaved, owned slaves, or participated in the slave trade through more than 950,000 searchable records.

### Freedmen's Bureau Project

<[www.discoverfreedmen.org](http://www.discoverfreedmen.org)>

In collaboration with FamilySearch, this site allows you to search nearly 1.8 million records of the formerly enslaved created by the Freedmen's Bureau, which was chartered to help the newly emancipated after the Civil War.

### International African American Museum Center for Family History

<[cfh.iaamuseum.org](http://cfh.iaamuseum.org)>

Part of a new museum, scheduled to open in 2022, this site searches marriage, obituary, Bible records and more, as well as offers articles, a blog, photos and videos.

## UK, IRISH AND COMMONWEALTH GENEALOGY WEBSITES

### CoraWeb

<[www.coraweb.com.au](http://www.coraweb.com.au)>

Cora Num has been gathering Australian genealogy links since 1997. You'll also find categories for research in New Zealand, the United Kingdom, India and Sri Lanka.

### FamilyRelatives.com \$

<[www.familyrelatives.com](http://www.familyrelatives.com)>

Though spanning the globe, this subscription site (\$44.95 per year) has a decidedly British and Commonwealth bent. Besides census, military and parish records, you can search probate registers, trade directories and the like.

### Library and Archives Canada

<[www.bac-lac.gc.ca](http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca)>

Canada's equivalents of the Library of Congress and National Archives are rolled into one here, with databases of censuses (1640–1926), vital records, immigration and passenger records (1865–1935), land transactions (1763–1930), military service (from 1777) and more.

### The National Archives (UK)

<[www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk)>

Download documents such as military records, wills, migration records and more.

### National Archives of Ireland

<[www.genealogy.nationalarchives.ie](http://www.genealogy.nationalarchives.ie)>

Search censuses (1901, 1911 and surviving fragments), marriage license bonds, crew lists, will registers, tithe applotment books from 1823 to 1837, Catholic convert rolls and more.

### National Library of Ireland

<[www.nli.ie](http://www.nli.ie)>

The pot of gold here is the browse-only collection of Catholic parish at <[registers.nli.ie](http://registers.nli.ie)>. You can also explore newspapers, manuscript catalogs, and collections of old photos.

### Programme de Recherche en Démographie Historique \* \$

<[www.prdh-igd.com](http://www.prdh-igd.com)>

Finding Quebec ancestors can be tricky, but this site makes all the province's Catholic baptisms and burials (as well as all 1621–1849 marriages) just a few clicks away. Fees for viewing results start at \$19.99 CAD for 100 hits.

### Public Record Office of Northern Ireland

<[www.nidirect.gov.uk/proni](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/proni)>

A handy Name Search allows one-click searching of various early records, such as wills and censuses. Other tools include street directories, old maps, will calendars and freeholders' records.

### RootsChat

<[www.rootschat.com](http://www.rootschat.com)>

“Bursting with help. Just join in!” invites Britain’s “busiest, largest” free family history forum, with more than 6.5 million posts from some 283,000 members.

### RootsIreland \$

<[www.rootsireland.ie](http://www.rootsireland.ie)>

Though somewhat pricey (\$264 per year), an investment in this subscription site could pay off with finds among 22 million records, including Griffith’s Valuation and church records from 34 county genealogy centers.

### ScotlandsPeople \$

<[www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk)>

“Virtual Volumes” serve up digital copies at the National Records of Scotland not indexed by personal name. That’s in addition to pay-per-view church records, censuses, valuation rolls and more; certain emigration records and a version of the 1881 census are free.

### Trove

<[trove.nla.gov.au](http://trove.nla.gov.au)>

Explore your Australian family history in this collaboration between the National Library of Australia and hundreds of partner organizations. Collections include digitized newspapers, maps, photos, books, diaries and letters.

## SCANDINAVIAN GENEALOGY WEBSITES

### ArkivDigital \$

<[www.arkivdigital.net](http://www.arkivdigital.net)>

All the Swedish records you might need can be found among the 90 million color scans at this subscription site (about \$200 per year), along with a growing collection of searchable indexes.

### Danish Demographic Database

<[ddd.dda.dk/ddd\\_en.htm](http://ddd.dda.dk/ddd_en.htm)>

Find your Danes in censuses as far back as 1787, plus probate indexes and emigration records courtesy of the Copenhagen police.

### Digitalarkivet

<[www.digitalarkivet.no/en](http://www.digitalarkivet.no/en)>

This comprehensive site from the National Archives of Norway is easy to search, packed with digitized records—and it’s free.

## EUROPEAN GENEALOGY WEBSITES

### Archion \$

<[www.archion.de/en](http://www.archion.de/en)>

Now with more than 125,000 digitized church books, improved zooming and search capability, this subscription site (about \$21 per month) is a must for German Protestant genealogy.

### Filae \*

<[en.filae.com](http://en.filae.com)>

Recently acquired by MyHeritage, this French genealogy site launched in 1994 now hosts more than a billion civil registrations, censuses, early church records and documents from 60 regional partner associations. Premium access costs about \$86 per year, with discounts available for MyHeritage users.

### Genealogy Indexer

<[www.genealogyindexer.org](http://www.genealogyindexer.org)>

The bare-bones home page of this search engine for Central and East European records is your gateway to 1.9 million pages from 3,443 historical directories, plus memorials to Jewish communities (Yizkor books), military lists, community and personal histories and school resources.

### Geneanet

<[en.geneanet.org](http://en.geneanet.org)>

Another *magnifique* site for French research, Geneanet has recently been acquired by Ancestry.com. It’s free to explore user-submitted trees, genealogical society indexes and resource guides. Premium members (about \$50 per year) enjoy advanced search tools and access to publications in the site’s Genealogy Library. See our complete guide at <[www.familytreemagazine.com/websites/geneanet](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/websites/geneanet)>.

### Geneteka

<[www.geneteka.genealodzy.pl](http://www.geneteka.genealodzy.pl)>

Volunteers from the Polish Genealogical Society have made searchable church registers covering more than 43 million individuals, organized by voivodeship (province) or country.

### Hungaricana

<[www.hungaricana.hu/en](http://www.hungaricana.hu/en)>

After you’ve researched your Hungarian ancestors in the more than 4 million pages of

digitized publications, 100,000 old maps, and 300,000 census pages, check out the “Budapest Time Machine.”

### **JewishGen**

<[www.jewishgen.org](http://www.jewishgen.org)>

Explore databases of East European towns, Jewish surnames, Holocaust victims, and families in this site affiliated with the Museum of Jewish Heritage. (Other databases span the globe.)

### **Il Portale Antenati**

<[www.antenati.san.beniculturali.it](http://www.antenati.san.beniculturali.it)>

Search by name or location in “The Ancestors Portal,” which serves up more than 115 million images and 1.5 million registries from 80 Italian archives.

### **Routes to Roots Foundation**

<[www.rtrfoundation.org](http://www.rtrfoundation.org)>

This genealogical guide to Jewish and civil records covers archives in Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, Lithuania and Moldova.

### **Wie Was Wie**

<[www.wiewaswie.nl/en](http://www.wiewaswie.nl/en)>

Find your Dutch ancestors in civil registrations, population records, church books and more, covering more than 220 million people.

## **GENETIC GENEALOGY WEBSITES**

### **23andMe \$**

<[www.23andme.com](http://www.23andme.com)>

In addition to its popular health reports, 23andMe also has more than 10 million DNA testers, making it worth a look for matching relatives. Its Family Tree feature automatically generates a visualization of genetic matches who have opted in. Ancestry-only testing costs \$99.

### **DNAexplained**

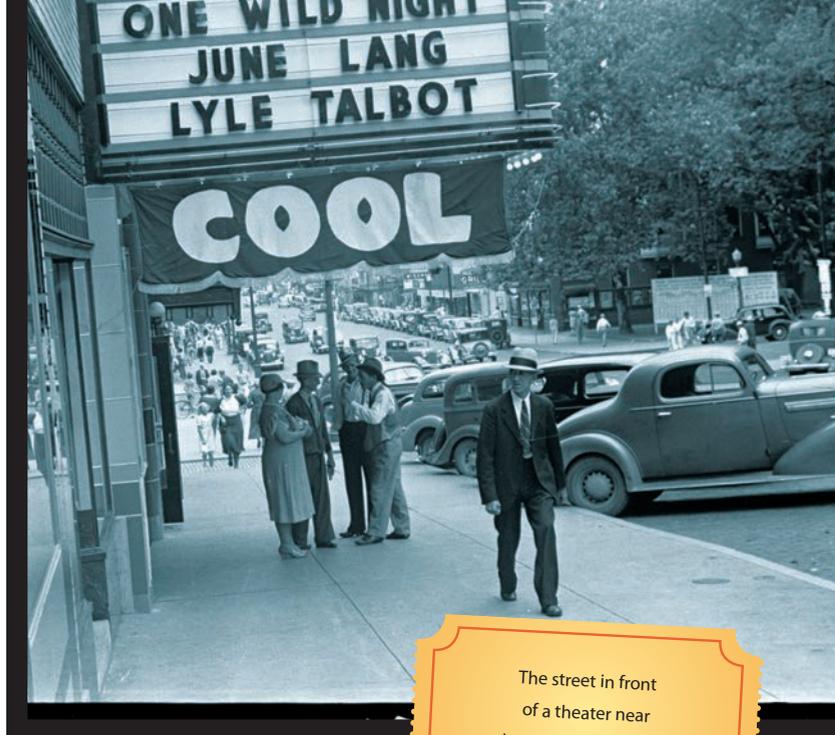
<[www.dna-explained.com](http://www.dna-explained.com)>

Can't tell your STRs from your SNPs? Don't know an AutoSegment Triangulation Cluster Tool from an automatic transmission? Genetic genealogist Roberta Estes is here to help.

### **Family Tree DNA \* \$**

<[www.familytreedna.com](http://www.familytreedna.com)>

This popular testing company boasts “the world's



The street in front of a theater near Lancaster, Ohio, 1938

most comprehensive DNA matching database for autosomal DNA, Y-DNA and mtDNA.” Tests range from \$79 all the way up to \$449.

### **GEDmatch**

<[www.gedmatch.com](http://www.gedmatch.com)>

When not helping crack “cold cases” with genetic genealogy, GEDmatch solves everyday DNA mysteries for its 1.4 million members. Upload your data from any popular testing service and put the site's 45-plus DNA tools to work.

### **International Society of Genetic Genealogy Wiki**

<[www.isogg.org/wiki/Wiki\\_Welcome\\_Page](http://www.isogg.org/wiki/Wiki_Welcome_Page)>

Got DNA questions? Get answers from the 700-plus expert articles at this group's helpful site, along with links to genetic genealogy blogs, testing companies and DNA projects.

### **Your DNA Guide \***

<[www.yourdnaguide.com](http://www.yourdnaguide.com)>

Whether you've already tested or are just exploring the science, this site serves up introductions to specific questions you can research with DNA, such as ethnicity and geographical origins; finding biological relatives; and identifying unknown ancestors. ●

*Family Tree Magazine* Founding Editor **David A. Fryxell** is the author of *The Family Tree Scandinavian Genealogy Guide* (Family Tree Books). *Spider-Man: No Way Home* was the first movie he'd seen in a theater in almost two years.





# COUNTING UP

Discover your ancestors in online census collections  
with these 26 practical search tips.

by RICK CRUME

**By my reckoning**, US federal census records are the best source of information on American ancestors. Taken every 10 years since 1790, the census reveals names, relationships and occupations—not to mention details on military service, immigration and marriage.

Starting with the 1950 census, you can work your way back through each enumeration to put together a rough outline of your family tree to the early 20th century. The loss of nearly the entire 1890 census was a tremendous blow for genealogists. But get past that gap, and you can continue to mine every-name enumerations back to 1850. While the censuses from 1790 to 1840 list only heads of household, they still provide valuable clues that can lead you to discoveries in other records.

Four huge genealogy websites—yes, the same four we compare late in this article—have the entire collection of US federal census records from 1790 through 1950, complete with digital images of the original records and every-name indexes. (One of them, FamilySearch <[www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)>, is free.) And if your public library has a subscription to HeritageQuest Online (provided by Ancestry.com), you can go to your library's website, log in with your library card number and access federal census records for free.

The following 26 tips will help you locate your ancestors in the census—despite poor handwriting in some records, the occasional misspelled name and many incorrect transcriptions. Most of these tips are geared toward researching censuses on specific websites, but the first three are universal.

# Taken every 10 years since 1790, the census reveals names, relationships and occupations—not to mention details on military service, immigration and marriage.

## GENERAL TIPS AND STRATEGIES

### 1. Try different combinations of search terms.

If searching on first name, last name, birth year and birthplace doesn't work, use different fields, such as the first name and year of birth *combined with* place of residence.

### 2. Search on abbreviations for given names.

Just in case the search engine doesn't find matches when a name is abbreviated in the original census, try shortened forms of common

names. For example: *Chas* for Charles, *Jas* for James, *Jno* for John, *Robt* for Robert, *Thos* for Thomas and *Wm* for William.

### 3. Follow up on clues.

When you find dates and places of birth, marriage and death in census records, look for copies of the corresponding records from the county or state for more details. Furthermore, an *Na* in the citizenship column of the census indicates the person was naturalized, so take that as a hint to look for naturalization records and citizenship papers. Likewise, if the census gives a year of immigration or indicates military service, check passenger lists and collections of service and pension files, respectively.



## Looking Ahead: The 1950 Census

Mark your calendars: The 1950 census is scheduled to come out on April 1, 2022, 72 years to the day after it was taken. That's still a couple of years away, but you might be curious about what to expect.

The 1950 census asked fewer questions than the 1940 census did. The enumeration recorded responses to just 20 questions, including name, age, address, relationship to head of household, marital status, state or country of birth, occupation and (if foreign-born) whether a naturalized US citizen. A 5-percent sample was asked additional questions, including the country of birth of the person's father and mother and whether the person had served in the US military.

When it was released in 2012, the 1940 census was placed online and made available for free, but indexes took several months to be created. The release of the 1950 census will probably follow the same pattern.

Without an index to the 1950 census, you'll need to know the enumeration district (E.D.) so you can browse records once they're released. To find the E.D. for your ancestor's place of residence, go to the Unified Census ED Finder from Stephen P. Morse and Joel D. Weintraub <[www.stevemorse.org/census/unified.html](http://www.stevemorse.org/census/unified.html)>. Select 1950, a state, county and city or town. Then click Get 1950 ED Number(s).

## ANCESTRY.COM

Ancestry.com <[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)> has the most complete collection of US federal census records and the most powerful tools for searching them. Select Census & Voter Lists from the Search tab, then U.S. Federal Census Collection from the Narrow by Category sidebar on the right. You can search all the federal censuses at once or select a specific year or collection.

### 4. Save time with hints.

Working in the background, Ancestry.com searches its record collections for census and other records pertaining to people in your Ancestry Member Tree. A green leaf indicates a potential match. Once you verify a match, Ancestry automatically creates a new Residence fact and a source citation, then links them to the record image.

### 5. Filter your results.

The census search forms include the option to "Match all terms exactly" or to specify how closely each individual term must match. Using the default settings, most of the top matches in a search for *William Fleming Morgan* are just William Morgan without a middle name or initial.



But my relative was usually known as William F. Morgan, so to limit matches to that version of his name, I can enter *William F* in the First & Middle Name(s) box and check just the box for Exact matches on that term. The top three matches appear to be the right guy in the 1880, 1910 and 1930 censuses. On the results page, you can also use the Search Filters sliders to adjust how close the given name, last name, year of birth and place of birth must match.

#### 6. Use a wildcard.

My ancestor John Robertson lived in Worcester, N.Y., from 1826 to 1864. However, he doesn't show up when searching for that name and place in the censuses from 1830 to 1860 even when using the "Sounds like, Similar and Sounded" options to broaden matches on last names. An asterisk wildcard substitutes for zero or more characters, so matches for *Rob\*son* could include Robson, Robison, Robinson and Robertson. A wildcard search turns up matches on John Robertson recorded in the 1830 and 1850 censuses of Worcester as John Robinson, the

tip

The National Archives—not the United States Census Bureau—manages the 1790 to 1950 US censuses. For more on how to access these historical headcounts, visit <[www.archives.gov/research/genealogy/census](http://www.archives.gov/research/genealogy/census)>.

1840 census as "Jno. Robbinson" and the 1860 census as "John Robison."

#### 7. Add keywords.

Searching on a keyword finds matches anywhere in a person's census record transcription, so it covers all the place fields, including the father's and mother's places of birth. Just about everyone with the surname Pennington who was born in New Brunswick, Canada, in the 19th century was a relative of mine, and several migrated to the United States. To find my Pennington relatives in Minnesota, I search on the last name *Pennington* and add Lived In *Minnesota, USA*, plus the keyword "*New Brunswick*" (in

quotation marks to search on the exact phrase). This finds people who were born in New Brunswick or who had at least one parent born there.

### 8. Add a family member.

You can search the 1870 census with father, mother, spouse or child, and later census years with all those options plus sibling. A 1900 search on *John G. Robertson*, born in about 1845 in New York, produces a match on my relative of that name. From this, I learn he was a fruit-grower with his wife Louisa in San Jose, Calif. Adding Louisa's name to the search (this time, of all censuses) reveals the family in the 1885 state census in Belle Plaine, Iowa.

### 9. Add parents' birthplaces.

A search of Ancestry.com's US federal census records for my relative William F. Morgan, who was born in 1863 in Pennsylvania, finds him living with his parents and siblings in the 1870 and 1880 censuses of New Brighton, Pa. But later census years show many William Morgans born in about 1863 in Pennsylvania. To zero in, I add

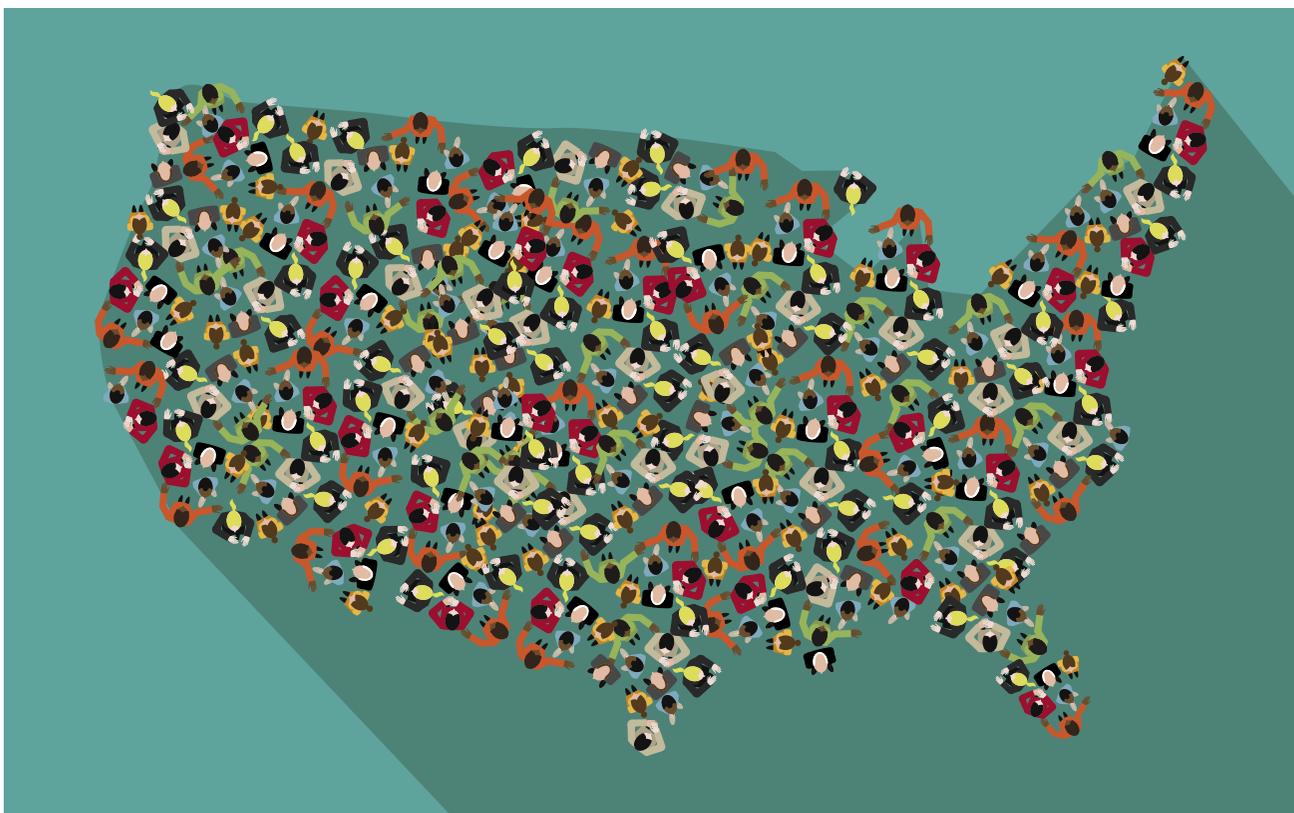
*Wales* as the father's birthplace and *Pennsylvania* as the mother's to the 1930 census search form, both requiring exact matches. Among the results is a widowed locomotive engineer living in Los Angeles in 1930, which I believe to be a match.

### 10. Browse the census.

If searching the census doesn't work (and you have a lead about where your ancestor lived), try browsing. Begin by choosing a census year. Then select a state, county and locality in the Browse This Collection box, and click on the link for the images. Use the left and right arrows to move from image to image.

### 11. Search the mortality schedules.

These list everyone who died in the 12 months prior to the 1850 and 1880 federal censuses (i.e., between June 1 of the preceding year and May 31 of the census year), plus a few states in 1885. The 1880 mortality schedule for Brooklyn, N.Y., shows that my relative John F. Robertson died of stomach cancer in February 1880 at age 60.



## 12. Search the 1890 veterans schedules.

While only a small fraction of the regular 1890 census still exists, the special veterans census taken that year <[www.ancestry.com/search/collections/8667](http://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/8667)> has extant records for DC and states alphabetically from Kentucky through Wyoming. Among the records, I find my relative Henry J. Hall, whose listed details include company, enlistment date and discharge date. With that information, I can get copies of his Civil War service and pension files, which will provide many more details on his military service and life after the war.

## 13. Search the agricultural schedules.

Part of the “U.S. Census Non-Population Schedules, New York, 1850–1880” collection <[www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1791](http://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1791)>, the agricultural schedules include farmers’ names and statistics about their farms. The 1860 agricultural schedule provides details on my ancestor Jonathan Hall’s farm, giving rich information about his life there: acreage (both “improved” and “unimproved”), farm value, livestock inventory and value, and the value of implements and machinery. The listing also tallies the year’s harvest, down to the last bushel of wheat and pound of butter.

## FAMILYSEARCH

From the home page <[www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)>, select Records from the Search tab to search all the indexed records on FamilySearch, including US federal census records. To search an individual census, enter *United States Census* in the Collection Title box under Find a Collection, then click on a title from the matches.

## 14. Scan selected census years at once.

From Search>Records, click the United States on the map. Then click on United States of America and, under Indexed Historical Records, click on Show All next to Filter by Collection. Scroll down to the collections beginning with the words “United States Census” and select the checkbox for the census year(s) you want to search. For example, you could select the 1920, 1930 and 1940 censuses. Scroll back up to the search form, enter a name and any other search terms, then click search. Results will include entries from only the censuses you’ve selected.



David A. Fryxell’s article “Find Ancestors Hiding in the Census” gives even more strategies for tracking down hard-to-find people in censuses <[www.familytreemagazine.com/premium/hiding-in-the-census](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/premium/hiding-in-the-census)>.

## 15. Work from the FamilySearch Family Tree.

Instead of filling out census search forms, go to someone’s profile in the Family Tree and click the Details tab. From the right-hand “Search Records” column, click FamilySearch. This will automatically plug the person’s information in a search form. To view just census results, scroll down to “Restrict Records By” on the left, then check the box for “Census, Residence, and Lists” under Type. Click Update to filter your results.

## 16. Fill out search forms carefully.

The census searches use generic forms, with some fields that don’t work with census records. When searching censuses from 1790 through 1840, focus on the fields for First Names, Last Names and Residence Place. For later census years, you can also use the fields for Birth Place and Birth Year. Usually, you should specify a range of at least two or three years for Birth Year so you don’t miss relevant matches.

## 17. Look for relatives *with* relatives.

Because only later censuses asked about relationship to head of household, the option to search with a relationship (spouse, father, mother or other person), works only on the 1880 censuses and later. You can also search these later census years by father’s birthplace and mother’s birthplace. Under “Search with a relationship,” click on Father or Mother and enter the birthplace. When you search on a parent’s birthplace, you can leave the field for the parent’s name blank.

## FINDMYPAST

Though perhaps best known for its UK records collections, Findmypast <[www.findmypast.com](http://www.findmypast.com)> offers US federal censuses as well. You can find them listed among the site’s full list of record sets <[search.findmypast.com/historical-records](http://search.findmypast.com/historical-records)>.



Great! You've found a bunch of details about your ancestor. Now what? Learn how to interpret information from the census <[www.familytreemagazine.com/premium/cracking-census-code](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/premium/cracking-census-code)>.

### 18. Scan multiple census years at once.

To search more than one US federal census year at a time, select Census, Land & Substitutes from the Search tab, then the Census subcategory on the left. Click Browse Record Set (next to the Record Set field) and enter *US census* in the Search Filters box. Click on all the years you want to search, then click Apply filters.

### 19. Use wildcards.

An asterisk can stand in for zero or more characters. A search on *John Robertson* in Schoharie County, N.Y., produces no matches in the 1810 and 1820 censuses, even when I search for name variants. But using a wildcard, a search for *John Rob\*son* should return any name starting with Rob and ending in *-son*. Indeed, the search turns up “John Robinson” in the 1810 and 1820 censuses of Middleburg, Schoharie County, N.Y.

### 20. Add a family member.

A search on Thomas Morgan, born in 1818 in Wales, produces 18 results. To focus on my relative, I click on Advanced Options, enter *Martha* in the Other Member's First Name(s) box and click on View Results. The first one is my second great-granduncle, a 52-year-old grocer born in Wales and living with his wife Martha and their four children in the 1870 census of New Brighton, Pa.

### 21. Add a keyword.

You can search the 1850 and later censuses by keyword, and it covers the father's birthplace in the censuses of 1880 and later. A search of the 1930 census for *Minnie E. Smith*, born in 1869 in Pennsylvania produces 83 matches. Add the keyword *Wales*, and it zeros in on my relative, apparently the only one whose father was born in Wales. She was age 61 and living with her sister and brother-in-law in Los Angeles.

## MYHERITAGE

To search MyHeritage <[www.myheritage.com](http://www.myheritage.com)> for all the US federal census records from 1790 to 1940 at once, select Census Records from the Research tab, then U.S. Census under “In Census & Voter Lists.”

### 22. Omit township and county.

When entering a township or a county in the Residence Place box, do not include the words *county* or *township*. Enter *Clay, Minnesota* or *Riverton, Clay, Minnesota*, not *Riverton Township, Clay County, Minnesota*.

### 23. Take advantage of Record Matches.

A brown icon beside a name in your family tree on MyHeritage indicates that potential record matches, such as census records, have been found for that person. Click on the icon to review and either confirm or deny the match, then (if a match) save to your tree.

### 24. Explore similar names.

Using the default search options, a search for my ancestor *Tobias Schaubhut* in the whole census collection produces just a few matches, none of which are my ancestor. So I need to revise my search. This time, I select all the options under “match similar names” beneath the last name field, then click the Search button again. That expands the results, including Tobias “Shafwood” in the 1800 census. While the spelling is way off, I'm sure he's my ancestor based on his other details.

### 25. Add a keyword.

You can search on keywords for any census year (as well as occupation in the 1880 census). Search on my last name *Crume* and the keyword *teamster*, and I find my great-grandfather John Crume, whose occupation is recorded as teamster (someone who drives a team of draft animals such as horses or oxen) in the 1880 census of Mankato, Minnesota.

### 26. Add a relative.

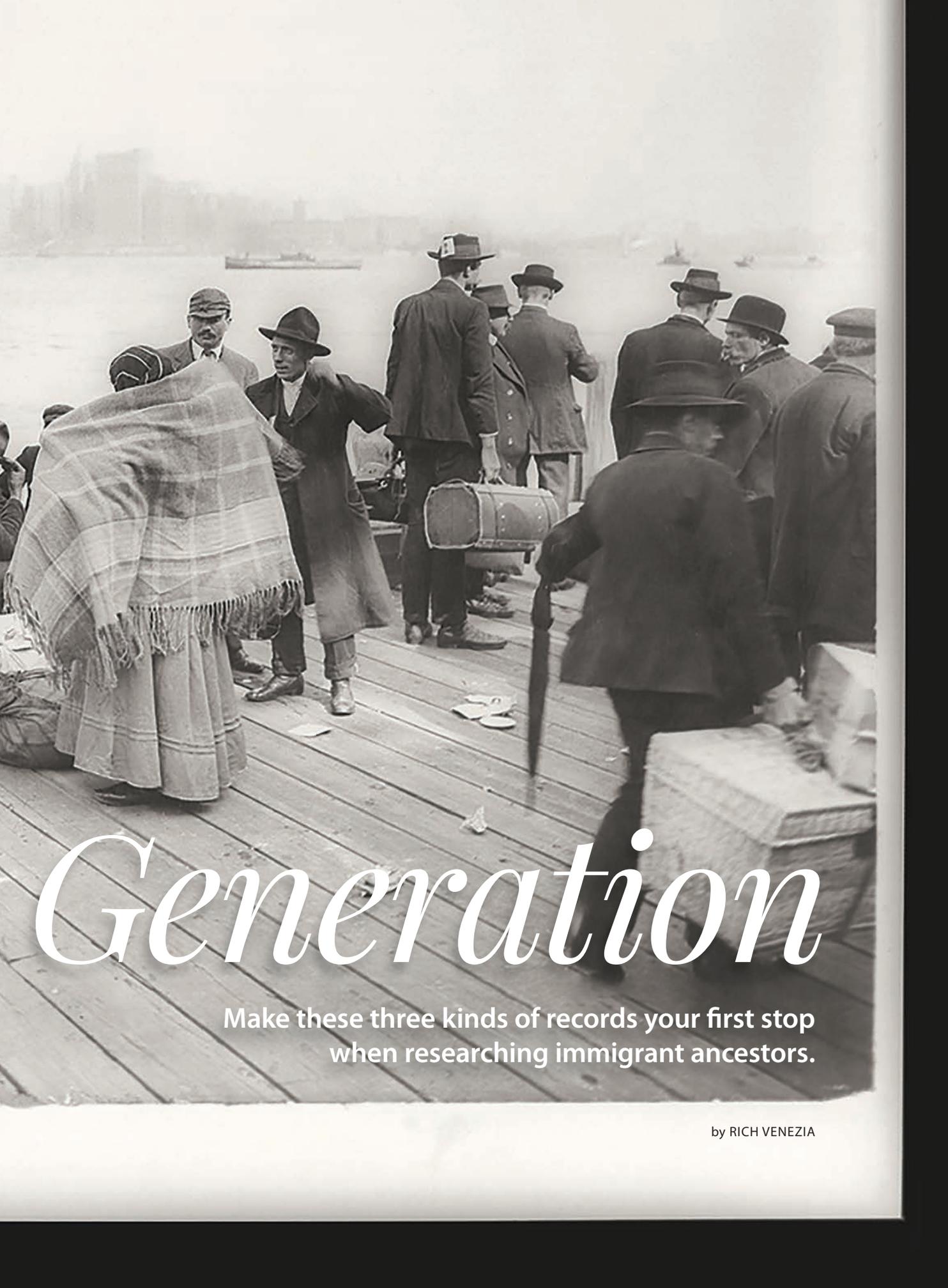
The advanced search options for the 1880 and later censuses let you search on the name of the target person's father, mother, spouse, child or sibling. Searching for my relative *James S. Robertson*, born in 1853 in New York, I find him and his wife Jennie in the 1880 census of South Worcester, N.Y. The family moved to Minnesota, but I lost track of them around 1900. Add spouse *Jennie* to the 1900 census search, and I find the family in Schuyler City, Neb. ●

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**Rick Crume** began his research years ago, scrolling through census records on microfilm.

Immigrants waiting  
to transfer to  
Ellis Island, 1912





# *Generation*

Make these three kinds of records your first stop  
when researching immigrant ancestors.

by RICH VENEZIA



Recent arrivals to Ellis Island from the *Princess Irene*, 1911

**I come from a long line** of immigrants. I'm a third-, fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-generation American. But I also have strong roots in the soil of southern Italy, the farmlands of southeastern Ireland, the potteries of England, and the Welsh countryside.

Most Americans can trace back their family history to immigrants—whether they arrived on the *Mayflower*, a Boeing-737, or sometime in the centuries between. Chain migration has been a main driver of population growth since the beginning of the United States, as individuals immigrated to reunite families or en masse

to populate a new village. Forces in home countries also pushed people to immigrate: political upheavals, wars, oppression, famine and lack of economic opportunities.

As with most genealogy searches, you can begin looking for documentation of your immigrant ancestor at home. Passports or old photos may give clues to point of origin, as well as any family traditions. Family lore—even if fantastical or misremembered—might contain some fact, and stands to be proven or disproven using records.

Whether other records of your immigrant ancestors exist depends on when and how they arrived in the United States, and what (if any) interaction they had with the government after. In this article, we'll discuss three key types of immigration records, plus a smattering of others. As we'll learn, not all immigrants were even eligible to generate certain records, but documents—when you find them—will help you trace your ancestor back to the Old World.

Of course, not all individuals who arrived in the United States did so willingly. Around a half-million enslaved Africans were forced to come to this country from the early 1600s to the mid-1800s. And another large group never “arrived” during this time period at all—Native American tribes lived in the land that became the United States for thousands of years before European contact. Still others lived in Hawaii, Texas, or Mexican-, French- or Spanish- held land (including the Philippines and Puerto Rico) that was annexed or conquered by the United States.

This article discusses records of those who willfully came to the United States after European colonization; researching ancestors who were forced to come or found themselves on US land via other means requires different record sets and methodologies.

## SITES FOR SETTING SAIL

Author David A. Fryxell shared the best websites for finding immigration records in the March/April 2018 issue of *Family Tree Magazine*. Here are seven of them:

1. The Statue of Liberty—Ellis Island Foundation <[heritage.statueofliberty.org/passenger](http://heritage.statueofliberty.org/passenger)>
2. Castle Garden <[www.castlegarden.org/searcher.php](http://www.castlegarden.org/searcher.php)>
3. Library and Archives Canada <[www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/immigration/Pages/introduction.aspx](http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/immigration/Pages/introduction.aspx)>
4. National Archives and Records Administration <[www.archives.gov/research/immigration](http://www.archives.gov/research/immigration)>
5. FamilySearch <[www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)>
6. Ancestry.com <[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)>
7. MyHeritage <[www.myheritage.com](http://www.myheritage.com)>

Read the full article at <[www.familytreemagazine.com/records/immigration/websites-finding-immigration-records](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/records/immigration/websites-finding-immigration-records)>.

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## *Passenger Manifests and Customs Lists*

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Perhaps the most consistent kind of immigration record is the passenger list—documentation that your ancestor arrived at a US port. But even this was not universally kept in early American history; the US government didn't require this paperwork until January 1820, and even then, the lists were meant to regulate customs, not people.

As such, surviving pre-1820 passenger lists are few and far between. The best resource for them is P. William Filby's *Passenger and Immigration Lists Index*, which indexes more than 500,000 early immigrant arrivals. A multi-volume series, the work is continuously updated to include later records and is available in its entirety on various online databases.

Records of arrivals after 1820 are much more widely available, including at major genealogy

websites. Still, customs lists from this era (1820–1891) contain scarce information:

- name
- age
- sex
- occupation
- port of embarkation

With such little identifying information, you may have trouble distinguishing your immigrant from others, particularly if they had a common last name. After all, the lists were designed to track goods, not your immigrant ancestors.

The government federalized the process surrounding immigration late in the 19th-century. The new forms reflected a shift in focus to regulating immigration, ballooning in size from six columns to more than 20. In

Passengers being examined aboard a vessel at Angel Island, 1931



# LIST OR MANIFEST OF ALIEN IMMIGRANTS FOR THE COMMISSIONER

Required by the regulations of the Secretary of the Treasury of the United States, under Act of Congress approved March 3, 1893, to be deposited in the office of the Commissioner of Immigration, at the port of arrival, a list of all alien passengers on board of every steamship or sailing vessel having such passengers on board upon at a port in the United States.

S. S. GRAFWALDERSEI sailing from Hamburg 2. Mai

1902 Arriving at Philadelphia

No. on List	NAME IN FULL	Age	Sex	Married or Single	Calling or Occupation	Able to Read, Write	Nationality	Last Residence	Race and Passport for landing in the United States	Final destination in the United States (State, City or Town)	Whether having a ticket to such final destination	By whom was passage paid	Whether in possession of money, if so whether more than \$20 and how much if \$20 or less
No. auf der Liste	Vollständige Namens-Aufgabe	Alter	Ge- schlecht	Ver- heiratet oder ledig	Stand oder Beruf.	Ob fähig zu Lesen Schrei- ben	Nationalität	Letzter Wohnort	Ankunftshafen in dem Vereinigten Staaten	Endgültige Reiseziel in dem Vereinigten Staaten	Bestehen die sie билет nach dem entsprechenden Reiseort.	Wer hat das Reisegeld gezahlt	Had die im Besitze von Geld, wenn ja so mehr als \$ 20 wie viel, ist \$ 20, oder weniger.
1	Johann David	38	m	✓	Handwerk	ja ja	Austrian	Leipzig	German	St. Louis, Mo.	no	amt.	700
2	Johann Hermann	39	m	✓	Handwerk	ja ja	Austrian	Leipzig	German	St. Louis, Mo.	no	amt.	700
3	Marie	29	f	✓	Wife	ja ja	Austrian	Leipzig	German	St. Louis, Mo.	no	amt.	700
4	Antonia	11	f	✓	Child	ja ja	Austrian	Leipzig	German	St. Louis, Mo.	no	amt.	700
5	Georg	7	m	✓	Child	ja ja	Austrian	Leipzig	German	St. Louis, Mo.	no	amt.	700
6	Sonja	6	f	✓	Child	ja ja	Austrian	Leipzig	German	St. Louis, Mo.	no	amt.	700
7	Henriette	3	f	✓	Child	ja ja	Austrian	Leipzig	German	St. Louis, Mo.	no	amt.	700
8	Thome Meyer	14	m	✓	Handwerk	ja ja	German	Hamburg	German	St. Louis, Mo.	no	amt.	700
9	Louis Lohse	21	m	✓	Handwerk	ja ja	German	Hamburg	German	St. Louis, Mo.	no	amt.	700
10	Marie Korfatz	21	f	✓	Wife	ja ja	German	Hamburg	German	St. Louis, Mo.	no	amt.	700
11	Mehel Kaszner	23	m	✓	Handwerk	ja ja	Polish	Warsaw	Polish	St. Louis, Mo.	no	amt.	700
12	Conrad Kab.	32	m	✓	Handwerk	ja ja	Polish	Warsaw	Polish	St. Louis, Mo.	no	amt.	700
13	Heinrich Kanner	43	m	✓	Handwerk	ja ja	Polish	Warsaw	Polish	St. Louis, Mo.	no	amt.	700
14	Jens. Kasselmann	30	m	✓	Handwerk	ja ja	Polish	Warsaw	Polish	St. Louis, Mo.	no	amt.	700
15	Johann Korman	23	m	✓	Handwerk	ja ja	Polish	Warsaw	Polish	St. Louis, Mo.	no	amt.	700
16	Just Lebal	34	m	✓	Handwerk	ja ja	Polish	Warsaw	Polish	St. Louis, Mo.	no	amt.	700
17	Luigi Gianick	31	m	✓	Handwerk	ja ja	Italian	Genoa	Italian	St. Louis, Mo.	no	amt.	700

1902 arrival list, digitized at Ancestry.com

addition to questions asked by customs list, post-1891 records may include:

- place of last residence
- who the immigrant was going to join
- exact place of birth
- closest relative or friend in home country

• ability to read or write and in which language

With so much information, these records are rightly coveted by researchers with immigrant ancestors who arrived in this time period. Fortunately, many—though not all—are available and indexed on genealogy websites.

## Naturalization Records

As it is today, naturalization was a goal for many immigrants and a source of pride for some families—though never, contrary to what some believe, required. With some exceptions, the standard road to citizenship has been a five-year process for immigrants.

From 1790 forward, free white immigrants could become naturalized US citizens after living in the United States for a number of years. But this privilege wasn't extended to people of other races until much later: those

of African descent in 1870 amidst Reconstruction and the Fourteenth Amendment, Chinese immigrants in 1943, Filipinos and Indians in 1946, and immigrants from other parts of Asia in 1952. The latter law, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, banned racial restrictions on most immigration and naturalization laws altogether.

An immigrant spouse or minor-aged child of a naturalized US citizen may or may not have automatically been considered a citizen,



## FINDING A PLACE OF ORIGIN

If researching in the records of the old country is the goal, an exact town of origin must often be found first. Many of the records we discuss in this article would include a place of origin. But dozens more might contain this type of information, many of which are not specific to immigrants. Some of them include:

- WWI and WWII draft records (place of birth)
- church marriage records (place of baptism)
- US passport applications (place of birth)
- military records (place of birth or citizenship)

Other documents, such as wills and deeds, may contain clues to place of origin, as might gravestones and obituaries.

Immigration and Naturalization Service or INS, today known as the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services or USCIS). Individuals generally naturalized in their county of residence, either at a local court (such as a common pleas court) or the federal district court with jurisdiction over their residence.

Prior to the change in 1906, naturalization records often don't contain much information, with details varying by the court that kept them. At minimum, they contain:

- name
- residence (often just city)
- country of former allegiance
- date of the oath

As with early ship manifests, there may not be enough information in early naturalizations to confirm with certainty whether the record is of your immigrant. But naturalization records generally contain more information after the early 1900s.

One potential gold mine from this era, however, are records kept between 1816 and 1828. The US government required that aliens (i.e., non-citizens) register with the local district court, and that the information be included in naturalization paperwork. (More on alien registration records in the next section.)

Beginning in 1906, the standardized declaration of intention and petition for naturalization forms provide a lot more information to the genealogist:

- exact date and place of birth
- exact address
- port and date of arrival

- occupation
- names and birthdates of spouse and children

Helpfully, photos were added to the declaration of intention and certificate of naturalization (more on this shortly) beginning in 1929. Note that someone may have filed a declaration of intent but never a petition for naturalization, and that declarations of intention were no longer required after 1952.

Many naturalization records are online, especially at FamilySearch <[www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)>. But just as many are located offline, either in paper form or on microfilm at various libraries, archives and genealogical societies. To search for naturalization records, start with the county clerk's office or the county genealogical society. The county library or archives might also be able to assist in locating the records of interest. National Archives regional branches <[www.archives.gov/locations](http://www.archives.gov/locations)> may hold federal naturalization records for states and/or territories in their jurisdiction.

There's one other document from the naturalization process you should be aware of: the actual certificate of naturalization. Unfortunately, certificates of naturalization prior to 1906 generally haven't survived outside of family collections. But starting in 1906, the government created two copies: one for the new citizen, and another for the government archive.

The latter is held by USCIS. That organization's fee-for-service Genealogy Program <[www.uscis.gov/records/genealogy](http://www.uscis.gov/records/genealogy)> holds C-Files (Certificate Files) for granted naturalizations from 1906 to 1956, including certificates of naturalization as well as supporting documents like declarations of intention and petitions for naturalization. C-Files are worth obtaining even if you've found all the constituent documents, as they might contain other records such as correspondence.

The Genealogy Program also holds some naturalizations for later years in A-Files (Alien Files). However, whether you can obtain an A-File through the USCIS Genealogy Program or a FOIA request, or via another federal agency (e.g., the National Archives) depends on several factors. Search the index to the Genealogy Program <[www.uscis.gov/history-and-genealogy/genealogy/searching-the-index](http://www.uscis.gov/history-and-genealogy/genealogy/searching-the-index)> to learn if and where such records exist.

# UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

## PETITION FOR NATURALIZATION

To the Honorable the District Court of the United States for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania:

The petition of Carl Kalla hereby filed, respectfully sheweth:  
First. My place of residence is 811 N 4th St Philadelphia, Pa.  
Second. My occupation is Clerk  
Third. I was born on the 14 day of February, anno Domini 1877, at Gleiwitz Germany  
Fourth. I emigrated to the United States from Hamburg Germany on or about the 2 day of May anno Domini 1902, and arrived in the United States, at the port of New York on the 14 day of May anno Domini 1902, on the vessel Graf Waldriss  
(If the alien arrived otherwise than by vessel, the character of conveyance or name of transportation company should be given.)

Filed January 22, 1913

Court of Pa  
She was born  
at Gleiwitz, Pennsylvania,  
in the following place:

any organization or body of persons teaching disbelief in or opposed  
to the principles of the Constitution of the United States, and it is my  
fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, and  
of whom at this time I am a subject, and it is my intention

Immediately preceding the date of this petition, to wit, since the  
Pennsylvania, continuously next preceding the date of this petition,  
and hence within this State of at least one year next preceding the date

to the Court of  
anno Domini 1  
and the  
and the cause of such denial has since been cured or removed.)

United States and the certificate from the Department of Commerce  
therefore your petitioner prays that he may be admitted a citizen of  
Carl Kalla  
(Completed and true signature of petitioner.)

he filed this 22 day of January, 1913.

### WITNESSES.

proceedings; that he has read the foregoing petition and knows the  
knowledge except as to matters therein stated to be alleged upon  
Carl Kalla  
(Completed and true signature of petitioner.)

at 735 773 24 Philadelphia, Pa.  
at 724 773 24 Philadelphia, Pa.

United States of America; that he has personally known  
above mentioned, to have resided in the United States continuously  
anno Domini 1902, and in the State in which the above-  
mentioned, anno Domini 1902; and that he has personal knowledge that  
United States, and that the petitioner is in every way qualified, in his

January  
Deputy Clerk.

Declaration of  
intention (1907)  
and petition for  
naturalization  
(1913) of Carl  
Kalla, digitized  
on FamilySearch

Stanley Goldsmid Cole  
TO BE ADMITTED A CITIZEN OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

### OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

No. 2572

Form 2203

TRIPLICATE  
(To be given to the alien making the Declaration)

# UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Department of Commerce and Labor  
BUREAU OF IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION  
DIVISION OF NATURALIZATION

## DECLARATION OF INTENTION

(Invalid for all purposes seven years after the date hereof)

United States of America } In the City of Philadelphia Court  
Eastern District of Penna } ss: of United States E. D. of Penna

Carl Kalla, aged 36 years,  
occupation Clerk, do declare on oath that my personal  
description is: Color White, complexion florid, height 5 feet 6 1/2 inches,  
weight 135 pounds, color of hair brn, color of eyes gray  
other visible distinctive marks none

I was born in Gleiwitz, Germany  
on the 14 day of February, anno  
Domini 1877; I now reside at 724 N 3rd St Philadelphia Pa

I emigrated to the United States of America from Hamburg Germany  
on the vessel Graf Waldriss my last  
foreign residence was Breslau, Germany

It is my bona fide intention to renounce forever all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign  
prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, and particularly to William II  
Emperor of Germany, of which I am now a citizen  
subject; I arrived at the port of New York, in the  
State Territory of New York on or about the 14 day  
of May, anno Domini 1902; I am not an anarchist; I am not a

polygamist nor a believer in the practice of polygamy; and it is my intention in good faith  
to become a citizen of the United States of America and to permanently reside therein:  
SO HELP ME GOD.

Carl Kalla  
(Original signature of declarant.)

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 26  
day of December, anno Domini 1907

[SEAL.]

Henry B Robb  
Clerk of the Court.  
By Henry C Liberton Deputy Clerk.

[SEAL.]

Upon considera  
further testimony ta  
to become a citizen o  
(It is further or  
and hereby is, chang  
"An Act to establish  
the United States," a  
By the Court:

Upon considera

THE SAID PETITI

Continued from

Continued from

Certificate of Nat



Recent arrivals from Puerto Rico awaiting air transport from Newark airport to New York City, 1947

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## *Alien Registrations*

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**A**liens (nationals of foreign countries who were US residents but not yet citizens) were required at various times throughout US history to register with the federal or state government. The earliest instance of this was in 1798 as part of the Alien and Sedition Acts.

It wasn't until the Civil War that aliens again registered with the government. In this case, alien men who wished to claim exemption from the Union Army draft could do so. Those who did appear in records now held across various regional National Archives branches, notably Kansas City.

World War I saw many alien registrations within the United States. German and Austro-Hungarian men and German women over age 14 had to register as enemy aliens between 1917 and 1918. While many of these records don't survive, the ones that do are true genealogical gems.

Fast-forwarding a few decades to 1940: The government required the registration of all aliens over age 14 living in or arriving into the United States. Between August 1940 and March 1944, more than 5.5 million aliens filled out an Alien Registration Form (Form AR-2). These records, which cover people who immigrated as early as the 1850s, are held by the USCIS Genealogy Program. They contain invaluable infor-

mation that may be found on no other US record. "Enemy" Aliens—aliens of German, Italian or Japanese origin as well as Americans of Japanese heritage—also registered separately during World War II.

The INS began filing all of an immigrant's records together in an A-File (Alien File) in April 1944. Individuals who arrived on or after that date had an A-File created upon arrival, and individuals who had registered between 1940 and March 1944 should have had their files consolidated into an A-File upon any further contact with the INS. They are now held by the USCIS or the National Archives.

A-Files can get very confusing, as not all aliens had one. And A-Files don't survive for all individuals who *once had* an A-File, as some were consolidated into other documents (such as C-files) if the individual naturalized prior to 1 April 1956. The best thing to do to determine whether an A-File exists (and, if it does, where it's located) is to conduct a USCIS Genealogy Program index search. A simple search of the National Archives catalog would also reveal whether an A-File has made its way to one of their facilities.

Amidst World War II, alien men of fighting age also needed to fill out an Alien's Personal

History and Statement, a four-page form chock-full of genealogical details. Records survive for most states, and nearly all states' records are with the National Archives of St. Louis. A few states' records are available online.



Learn more about why your ancestors left their home countries and what they encountered on their journeys <[www.familytreemagazine.com/records/immigration/emigration-factors](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/records/immigration/emigration-factors)>.

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## *Other Records*

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So far, we've just scraped the surface of the many documents available to those researching immigrant ancestors. Sunny Jane Morton compiled a list of 17 sources (including some we've discussed in this article) that share information about immigrants after their arrival <[www.familytreemagazine.com/records/immigration/us-record-types-immigrant-ancestors](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/records/immigration/us-record-types-immigrant-ancestors)>. And I wrote a series of articles for FamilyTreeMagazine.com that serve as case studies for using records—especially less conventional ones, such as county histories—in your research <[www.familytreemagazine.com/author/rich-venezia](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/author/rich-venezia)>.

Here are some other types of immigration documents worth special mention.

### **Detention and Special Inquiry Records**

Beginning in 1893, arriving passengers could be detained if immigration officials believed they may have been ineligible for admission under various laws. Some examples include being a contract worker, a criminal, infected (or suspected of being infected) of a contagious disease, or otherwise a high risk of becoming a public charge.

Detention records also sometimes exist, showing individuals who were waiting to be collected by a relative or a representative of an immigrant aid society. Others may have needed funds to be telegraphed prior to continuing their journey.

Board of Special Inquiry and Detention lists exist for some ports.

### **Visas**

Prior to the early 1900s, visas were not required for entry into the United States. If an individual could afford a ticket and the head tax (which began in 1882 at 50 cents per immigrant), they could immigrate.

But by the time an immigration quota system was introduced in 1921, visas were required.

Beginning in July 1924, as part of the restrictive Immigration Act of 1924, visas and associated paperwork (like a birth or marriage record and a police clearance) were collected from each arriving immigrant after having been approved at a consulate abroad. These make up the 3.1 million Visa Files currently held by the USCIS Genealogy Program. (This series closed in April 1944. Visas were still required; they were filed in A-Files after that point.)

The National Archives at College Park, Md., has its own set of Department of State Visa Case Files (1914–1940). These records are different than the Visa Files, but an immigrant may be found in both record sets.

### **Bureau of Naturalization Files**

Beginning in 1906, the agencies that became the INS kept correspondence files on specific cases. People may have written to the Bureau to check on their derivative citizenship status, or neighbors may have written to snitch on someone they thought had obtained citizenship fraudulently. Learn more at <[www.familytreemagazine.com/case-studies/bureau-naturalization-correspondence-files](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/case-studies/bureau-naturalization-correspondence-files)>.

These records have been compiled by the National Archives <[catalog.archives.gov/id/563066](http://catalog.archives.gov/id/563066)>, indexed in microfilm A3388. At time of writing, the collection is only available in the National Archives' microfilm reading room. But researchers are hopeful at least the index will be made available online soon.

Our immigrant ancestors wrote our story; it's time we write theirs. ●

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**Rich Venezia** is a professional genealogist based in Philadelphia, and specializes in 20th-century immigration and naturalization research. He lectures all over the country about immigration records, and continues to fight for fairer access to these records.



# Birth Records

The road to discovering your ancestor's past is often gated by the need to answer essential questions about his or her beginnings: When was he born? Where was her birthplace? Who were his parents?

The key to unlocking that gate often lies in birth records. This article will look at what you might find in a birth record, what types of records exist for different places and time periods, and how to access the records. Because birth records aren't always available, we'll identify other resources you can utilize as alternatives.

## CLUES IN BIRTH RECORDS

Birth records are prized sources to genealogists because the informant was often a parent, doctor or other witness to the birth. As a result, a birth record generally contains primary (firsthand) information.

The two main types of US birth records are certificates and registers. A **birth certificate**, usually issued by the state, is a document naming an individual child. A **birth register**, frequently created by a city or county, lists many births occurring over a period of time. While both types of records tend to be trustworthy, registers are more prone to error because they may have been recorded later, when an informant reported the birth to a clerk.

In a typical birth record, you might find statements about:

- date of birth
- place of birth
- child's sex and race
- child's name
- mother's first (and possibly maiden) name
- father's name
- parents' residence
- parents' occupations
- parents' ages and/or birthplaces

Not every record will include all of these details. And because any record can contain errors, you should compare what you find with other sources. A baptism record, draft card or death certificate might confirm a birth date. Sometimes these later records conflict with information in the birth record. In that case, look at all the evidence to determine which answer is best supported by reliable sources.

The golden nugget that keeps genealogists panning for birth records is information identifying the child's parents. Not only does this yield names for your pedigree chart, it provides hard-to-find evidence of relationships between people who lived long ago.

## BIRTH RECORD COVERAGE

Today we depend on birth certificates as identification for driver's licenses, passports and other documents. But a birth certificate for every child is a relatively modern concept. Until the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many states lacked clear regulations for birth records. Learning when registration laws took effect where your ancestor was born is the first step to a successful search.

The towns of New England win the prize for the earliest birth registers. Connecticut, New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Rhode Island town records date from the 1600s, with Vermont and Maine right behind. Some town records list all the children in a family together. Many larger cities began keeping vital records earlier than their states, in the 1800s.

Eventually, most states passed laws requiring counties to collect birth and death information, but the laws were often difficult to enforce. Kentucky counties began recording births in 1852, but stopped 10 years later. And even when the law stuck, compliance frequently lagged. In Ohio, which initiated county records in 1867, the job of collecting information typically fell to busy doctors or tax assessors, so many births went unrecorded.

Massachusetts was the first to mandate birth registration at the state level in 1841. New Jersey followed in 1848. (Hawaii started in 1842, but was then an independent kingdom.) By 1912, most states required births to be recorded. See a list of years statewide birth records started in each state at [www.familytreemagazine.com/freebie/us-statewide-vital-records-websites-download](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/freebie/us-statewide-vital-records-websites-download). (Remember that civil records may have been kept at the local level before these dates.)

Inconsistent birth records created problems when the Social Security Act was passed in 1935. Thousands of people born in the late 1800s and early 1900s found they lacked documentation needed for a Social Security card. This led to a rising number of delayed birth certificates in the 1940s. People often requested delayed birth certificates where they lived at the time, rather than where they were born, so search in both places. Delayed birth certificates are usually filed separately from infant certificates.

You also might find an amended birth certificate, with information added or corrected at a later time. If a certificate didn't originally contain the child's name, or the name

# At a Glance: Birth Certificate

STATE OF OHIO  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
DIVISION OF VITAL STATISTICS  
**CERTIFICATE OF BIRTH 11273**

County of Franklin  
Township of Marion  
Village of \_\_\_\_\_  
City of \_\_\_\_\_

Registration District No. 392 File No. \_\_\_\_\_  
Primary Registration District No. 4596 Registered No. 399  
No. 85 Main Ave. St. \_\_\_\_\_ Ward \_\_\_\_\_  
(If birth occurred in a hospital or institution, give NAME instead of street and number)

FULL NAME OF CHILD William Steele { If child is not yet named, make supplemental report, as directed

Sex of Child <u>Male</u>	Twin, triplet or other? <u>-</u> (To be answered only in event of plural births)	Number in order of birth <u>-</u>	Legitimate? <u>yes</u>	Date of birth <u>Feb 2 - 1931</u> (Month) (Day) (Year)
FATHER FULL NAME <u>Homer Steele</u>		MOTHER FULL MAIDEN NAME <u>Emma Scheibel</u>		
RESIDENCE Including P. O. Address <u>85 Main Ave.</u>		RESIDENCE Including P. O. Address <u>85 Main Ave.</u>		
COLOR or RACE <u>White</u>	AGE AT LAST BIRTHDAY <u>37 yr.</u> (Years)	COLOR or RACE <u>White</u>	AGE AT LAST BIRTHDAY <u>36 yr.</u> (Years)	
Birthplace (city or place) <u>Cheshire, Ohio</u> (State or country)		Birthplace (city or place) <u>Columbus, Ohio</u> (State or country)		
OCCUPATION a. Trade, profession, or particular kind of work done, as spinner, sawyer, bookkeeper, etc. b. Industry or business in which work was done, as silk mill, sawmill, bank, etc. c. Date (month and year) last engaged in this work <u>Feb 2, 1931</u>	Shipping <u>3</u> clerk <u>Island Co.</u>		OCCUPATION d. Trade, profession, or particular kind of work done, as housekeeper, typist, nurse, clerk, etc. e. Industry or business in which work was done, as own home, lawyer's office, silk mill, etc. f. Date (month and year) last engaged in this work <u>Feb 2, 1931</u>	h. Total time (years) spent in this work <u>15 yr.</u>
	g. Total time (years) spent in this work <u>14 yr.</u>			
Number of children of the mother (At time of the birth and including this child) <u>4</u>		(a) Born alive and now living <u>5</u>	(c) Stillborn <u>0</u>	Is child congenitally deformed? <u>no</u>
If stillborn, period of gestation _____ { months or weeks		Cause of stillbirth _____		Was Prophylactic against Ophthalmia Neonatorum used? <u>yes</u>
If stillborn, _____ { Before labor _____ During labor _____				

**CERTIFICATE OF ATTENDING PHYSICIAN OR MIDWIFE**

I hereby certify that I attended the birth of this child, who was alive at 2:48 A. m. on the date above stated.  
(Born Alive or Stillborn)

{ When there was no attending physician or midwife, then the father, householder, etc. should make this return. Given name added from a supplemental report. (Date of) \_\_\_\_\_

(Signed) 5 Andrew Rogers, M. D.  
or Theresa J. P. H., Midwife  
Address 187 E. State St.  
F. W. Kroger  
REGISTRAR

Filed FEB 3 1931 REGISTRAR

Citation: Ohio Department of Health, birth certificate 11273 (1931), William Steele; Division of Vital Statistics, Columbus.

**1** A mother's maiden name is a valuable find. Now you can search marriage records and earlier census records of Columbus, Ohio, for Emma Scheibel in her parent's household.

**2** The father's age and city of birth suggests where to look for him in birth records. Determine the name of the county, then search county registers.

**3** Occupational clues provide interest for your family history.

This Depression-era record names the glass factory where the father worked.

**4** The number of children born to the mother indicates William had four older siblings, helping you reconstruct the family.

**5** Issued one day after the birth and signed by the attending physician, this original record contains primary (first-hand) information prized by genealogists.

was changed, a form attached to the original certificate may clarify. The supplement becomes part of the official record.

Due to privacy concerns, some states limit access to birth records. Every state sets its own rules for issuing copies. At one end of the spectrum are states with open access, including North Carolina, Ohio and Kentucky. Nevada, at the opposite end of the spectrum, closes its birth records to the public. Still other states permit access to older records, but restrict more recent ones (say, records of events that occurred within the past 75 or 100 years).

Researchers requesting restricted records may need a government ID, proof of close kinship to the individual and/or a notarized signature. Some states offer uncertified informational copies or abstracts for genealogical use.

## ACCESSING BIRTH RECORDS

A good starting point for finding birth records is the FamilySearch Research Wiki <[www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Main\\_Page](http://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Main_Page)>. Search for the state, then (on the resulting state page) click Vital Records and scroll down for a description of birth record availability, links to online databases and finding aids, and places where records are held. Another valuable finding aid, Cyndi's List <[www.cyndislist.com/births](http://www.cyndislist.com/births)>, provides links to birth and baptism records.

### Online

FamilySearch <[www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)> has numerous free collections of birth and baptism records. To find them, click the United States in the map on the main Search page, then the name of the state. Scroll down to view available collections, both indexed and image-only.

Popular subscription genealogy sites have birth and baptism collections as well. Search Ancestry.com's Birth, Baptism and Christening collection <[www.ancestry.com/search/categories/bmd\\_birth](http://www.ancestry.com/search/categories/bmd_birth)>, which has indexes and/or record

images for various states and time periods. MyHeritage <[www.myheritage.com](http://www.myheritage.com)> also has a number of birth indexes. And if you have New England roots, explore the early town records available at <[www.americanancestors.org](http://www.americanancestors.org)>.

Several states, counties and even large cities have created online birth record indexes or begun digitizing older records. For example, West Virginia has added thousands of births to its database at <[www.wvculture.org/vrr](http://www.wvculture.org/vrr)>. Search online for the locality and the words *birth records genealogy*.

### City and County Offices

Because most early birth records were created at the local level, requesting the record from a local office can be one of your best strategies. The originals might still be at the town hall, probate court, orphan's court or county clerk's office. To find the right office, search online or consult a published guide. It's a good idea to contact the office before mailing in a request for your ancestor's record, to confirm the address and make sure you've included the correct payment.

### State Offices and Archives

You'll typically find state-held birth records at the department of health or vital statistics. Google *Tennessee vital records*, for example, or consult the list of links to state offices at <[www.cdc.gov/nchs/w2w/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/w2w/index.htm)>. Alternatively, if the health department has turned its older records over to the state archives or historical society, you could find the record there. Some state archives have birth records or indexes online, so check the archives' website or the FamilySearch Research Wiki for information.

Most offices explain their request policies and restrictions on their websites, offering mail-in and/or online ordering where allowed by law. Fees vary, ranging from a few dollars up to about \$30. You'll need to provide information such as the child's name, birth date, birthplace and at least one parent's name, although some offices will do searches for an extra fee.

For speedier but costlier service, you can order certificates from VitalChek <[www.vitalchek.com](http://www.vitalchek.com)>. VitalChek can't bypass the rules for restricted records, but it can expedite the ordering process.

## BIRTH RECORD SUBSTITUTES

A variety of records created over a person's lifetime can provide evidence of his birth, including:

**Baptism records:** An infant's baptismal record is the next best thing to a birth register. You'll typically learn the child's name, dates of birth and baptism, parents' names and residence, and godparents or sponsors.

Baptism records could be in any number of places—at the original church or a church it merged with, a denominational archive, or a local archive. Some early church

## Fast Facts

**Coverage:** Varies by location, ranging from town settlement (17th-century New England) to statewide registration (as late as the 1910s)

**Jurisdiction where kept:** State department of health or vital statistics office

**Key details:** Name of the child; date and place of birth; names of parents (including maiden name of mother); parents' residence, ages and occupations

**Alternates and substitutes:** baptism records, Social Security records, home sources, death records, cemeteries, marriage records

records have been published in books or digitized on FamilySearch. Many church records have been digitized but not yet indexed, so you may need to browse images.

If you contact a church directly, remember that the church is under no obligation to supply records. Courtesy and perhaps a small donation go a long way.

**Social Security records:** A Social Security application, or SS-5, contains the person's full name, date and place of birth, father's name, mother's maiden name, and signature. The Social Security Death Index (SSDI), available on Ancestry.com and FamilySearch, identifies many people who died between 1962 and 2014. To get the most out of a Social Security record, order the SS-5 application online at <[www.ssa.gov/foia/request.html](http://www.ssa.gov/foia/request.html)>.

**Home sources:** If you've found a family Bible record for your ancestors, you're a step ahead on the evidence trail. Notations of births, marriages and deaths in a Bible can fill gaps where few other records exist. Bibles tended to migrate with the family, so check archival collections in all the areas where relatives lived.

Scrapbooks, baby books, letters, certificates of baptism,

hospital souvenirs and the like are valuable sources of birth information. Ask older relatives and cousins if they know of such treasures. You can carefully scan and photocopy the documents and share them with other family members.

**Death records:** Ironically, your best source of birth information might be the records created after someone died. Most death records note a date and place of birth, and many also give the parents' names and birthplaces. While this can be a great find, remember that the informant generally had only secondhand knowledge of the deceased's origins. Official death records are generally available from the same offices as birth records.

**Cemeteries:** Tombstone photos and transcriptions are increasingly easy to find, thanks to sites like Find a Grave <[www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com)> and BillionGraves <[www.billiongraves.com](http://www.billiongraves.com)>. A person's tombstone might give a birth date or year, or express age in years, months and days.

**Marriage records:** Depending on laws at the time, valuable firsthand information such as ancestors' ages, birth dates, birthplaces and parents' names might appear on marriage licenses. FamilySearch has microfilmed and/

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or digitized many marriage records. Originals are usually at the town hall or county courthouse.

**Newspapers:** Birth announcements were uncommon in 19th-century newspapers, although you may find one for a prominent family. They became popular by the mid-20th century and generally note the parents' names, baby's gender and date of birth, and the hospital. Obituaries also might mention a date and place of birth. The state archives or a local library might have microfilmed local papers and/or birth indexes. Search newspapers at the free [Chronicling America <chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>](http://ChroniclingAmerica.loc.gov) and subscription sites [GenealogyBank <www.genealogybank.com>](http://GenealogyBank.com) and [Newspapers.com <www.newspapers.com>](http://Newspapers.com).

**Censuses:** Federal census records since 1850 give the name, age and general birthplace of everyone in the household. The 1900 census goes a step beyond, noting the month and year of birth. Because you seldom know who spoke to the census taker, treat census information as hints to the birth, and look for verifying records.

**Military records:** If your ancestor served in the military or registered for the draft, another research trail

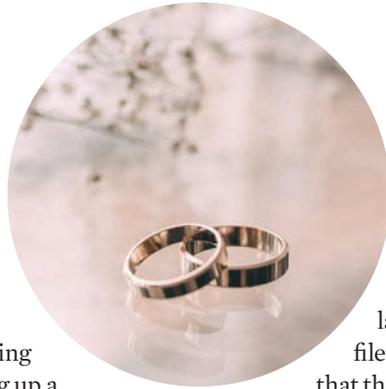
opens. Union Civil War draft lists give the registrant's birthplace and age on a specific date. Likewise, WWI and WWII draft registrations note the person's date of birth. All three collections are available on [Ancestry.com](http://Ancestry.com). Pension records for soldiers and their widows contain a wealth of genealogical information.

**Immigration records:** Clues to an immigrant's birth date and birthplace might be in a ship's passenger list, declaration of intention or naturalization certificate. Online, [Ancestry.com](http://Ancestry.com), [FamilySearch](http://FamilySearch.org) and [Findmypast](http://Findmypast.com) have extensive immigration and naturalization collections. The search forms at [www.stevemorse.org](http://www.stevemorse.org) help you search Ellis Island, Castle Garden and other immigrant ports of entry. Check state archives and courthouses near your ancestor's residence for naturalization papers.

The quest to discover the details of your ancestor's birth is exciting and fulfilling. Armed with new knowledge of when and where she was born, you'll be poised to research her parents and extend the branches of your family tree. ●

**Shelley K. Bishop**

# Marriage Records



The government has long needed to track couples' marriages, to ensure that: children inheriting their parents' property have a right to do so; people didn't marry close relatives; nobody was married to more than one person at the same time; and both parties were above the age of consent. (And, if they weren't, that they had the consent of their parents or legal guardian.)

Because of that utility, marriage records can provide important genealogical details and point to new avenues for research. This guide will help you determine where to look for marriage records and record substitutes, as well as what information you may find in them.

## CLUES IN MARRIAGE RECORDS

Although marriage laws and customs varied greatly by county and state, the general process unfolded this way: After the bride and groom agreed to marry, they had to obtain a license or post banns.

A **marriage license** gave permission for a justice of the peace, rabbi or minister to marry a couple. In the 20th century, couples had to fill out an application for a license before one could be issued. If the bride or groom were under the age of consent, a letter of consent might have been submitted when the license application was filed.

Some states allowed a couple who didn't want to pay for a license to instead post banns for three consecutive Sundays in local churches. **Banns** announced a couple's intention to marry and gave the community time to object to the union.

In some states, primarily in the South, grooms had to first place themselves under **bond**, meant to defray court expenses if a planned marriage were not to take place. One

or two other men acted as surety to the bond.

The acquisition of the license, posting of banns, or putting up a bond all assured the state and the community that there were no legal impediments to the marriage.

After the ceremony, the officiant returned a record of the marriage to the courthouse. The **returns** were then either filed or entered into a bound **marriage register**. The officiant stopped by the courthouse to register or return the marriages he'd performed over a certain period of time. The couple might receive a **certificate** as an official record as well.

No matter what type of marriage record survives for your ancestor, you're likely to find at least some of the following information:

- names of bride and groom
- date and location of marriage
- name of officiant (justice of the peace, minister, etc.)
- names of bride's and groom's parents
- occupations of bride and groom
- ages and dates of birth for the bride and groom
- birthplaces for the bride, groom and parents
- names of witnesses
- names of surety or bondmen to marriage bond

Other details are less universal, but no less important. Unless the marriage was the bride's second, the record will also include the bride's maiden name. If the officiant was a minister or rabbi, researching him can shed light on the religious affiliation of your ancestors and lead to additional records. If the record includes the names of the couple's parents and their birthplaces, you'll have a jump-start on your

research of the previous generation. Depending upon the state's marriage laws, if no consent was filed, you can be fairly sure that the groom was at least age 21 and the bride was at least 18.

Women are harder to trace, but marriage bonds generally provide one or two names of men with whom the bride was associated. The men who stood surety to the groom were frequently the bride's father or brother, or otherwise connected to her family. (Surety was rarely from the groom's family.)

The witnesses listed on a marriage record were usually the couple's family members or close friends—researching these folks can help you find records naming your ancestors. Sometimes, though, witnesses had no connection with the bride or groom and just happened to be nearby.

## MARRIAGE RECORD COVERAGE

Due to the importance of marriage to the community and inheritance law, marriage records were typically kept in some form, even before statewide registration was required. Most county marriage records began when the county was formed. In eastern states, town or parish officials kept marriage records dating back to Colonial times.

Marriages were often the last vital record collected at the state level. Massachusetts began requiring statewide marriage records in 1841, but Washington and Nevada didn't do so until 1968.

Wherever and whenever your ancestor married, there would've been some official mechanism for recording marriages: either by the state or an agency on behalf of the state, and/or an official from a church. *The Hidden Half*

of the Family by Christina Kassabian Schaeffer (Genealogical Publishing Co.) includes a list of marriage and divorce laws in each state.

Remember that *what the state required* and *what was enforced at the local level* were often two different things. Pennsylvania has required marriage registration since it was a colony, but this law was not enforced and few people complied. Ministers might forget to return records, and human error could cause clerks to skip records when entering them into the marriage register.

### ACCESSING MARRIAGE RECORDS

Marriage records are a diverse record group, especially because each state was responsible for laws governing these records. Record coverage and the information contained varies by state and time period. For help navigating the many possibilities, consult FamilySearch United States Marriage Records Wiki <[www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United\\_States\\_Marriage\\_Records](http://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Marriage_Records)>. This page links to details on vital records for each state. RootsWeb has its own overview of marriage records, excerpted from *The Source: A Guidebook to American Genealogy* <[wiki.rootsweb.com/wiki/index.php?title=Marriage\\_Records](http://wiki.rootsweb.com/wiki/index.php?title=Marriage_Records)>.

**Transcriptions:** Marriage records are among the first records that genealogical societies and interested individuals have indexed and transcribed. Published indexes and

transcriptions often are at historical societies and larger regional libraries. Some have been posted online at county genealogy websites, many of which are affiliated with the USGenWeb Project <[www.usgenweb.org](http://www.usgenweb.org)> (click on your ancestor's state, then the county). Find other genealogical societies by doing a web search for the name of the county with the state and genealogy.

**Online:** FamilySearch <[www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)>, Ancestry.com <[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)>, Archives.com <[www.archives.com](http://www.archives.com)> and MyHeritage <[www.myheritage.com](http://www.myheritage.com)> provide access to indexes and records from across the country. Because these sites have a broad scope, you can search records from multiple states and time periods at once.

Some states, such as West Virginia, provide access to an index and images of marriage records themselves. For West Virginia, see <[www.wvculture.org/vrr/va\\_mcsearch.aspx](http://www.wvculture.org/vrr/va_mcsearch.aspx)>. Other marriage records are organized by agency or region. FamilySearch has Southern marriage records of the Freedmen's Bureau, a post-Civil War government agency <[www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1414908](http://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1414908)>, while the Western States Historical Marriage Records Index <[abish.byui.edu/specialCollections/westernStates/search.cfm](http://abish.byui.edu/specialCollections/westernStates/search.cfm)> has more than 900,000 marriages from that part of the country, abstracted and indexed. For

more online records and indexes, run a Google <[www.google.com](http://www.google.com)> search for the state and county plus the term *marriage records*.

**City and county offices:** Until the beginning of statewide registration, county or (in New England) town clerks filed marriage records in the county courthouse or town hall. At the courthouse, these records could be maintained by several offices including the probate court, orphan's court, clerk of court, county clerk, registrar of deeds and the district court.

**State offices and archives:** Statewide registration of marriages is handled by either a State Department of Health or Vital Statistics. VitalRec <[www.vitalrec.com](http://www.vitalrec.com)> provides information on how to locate the appropriate office for each state. Luckily, many older marriage records have been deposited at the relevant state archives, and some of the locales have put records or indexes online. For example, an index-only database is available from the Colorado State Archives at <[www.colorado.gov/pacific/archives/marriage-records](http://www.colorado.gov/pacific/archives/marriage-records)> and Illinois has a free statewide marriage index at <[www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/archives/databases/marriage.html](http://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/archives/databases/marriage.html)>.

**Church records:** Religious records may provide marriage information and more about your ancestor; for example, records of ethnic churches often listed members' European origins. The existence, survival and accessibility of church records varies. Search the FamilySearch online catalog for the county and state you're interested in, then look for a Church Records heading. Also check the website's list of published collections <[www.familysearch.org/search/collection/list](http://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/list)> for available digitized church records.

Catholic records, if still held by the Church, are typically not open to the public, but parish staff may be willing to assist you. To see what records are available for your ancestor's denomination and where they might

## Fast Facts

**Coverage:** Varies by locality. Usually kept by county from foundation, then by state officials beginning in the 19th or 20th century

**Jurisdiction where kept:** State departments of health or vital statistics offices; copies at state archives, county courthouses, town halls, denominational archives, local religious institutions

**Key details:** Name of bride and groom; marriage date; name of officiant; county; name of bride's and groom's parents; birthplaces for bride, groom and parents; names of surety (bondsmen)

**Alternates and substitutes:** newspapers, church publications and records, censuses, death records, probate records, pension records, obituaries, Bible records

## At a Glance: Marriage Register

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# MARRIAGE RECORD.

PARTIES.	AFFIDAVIT.	RETURN.
<p><b>1</b></p> <p>Alexander McGregor AND Mary A. Rose</p> <p>LICENSE.</p> <p>Issued the 15th day of September A. D. 1871, to the above named parties, N.P.M.</p>	<p>The State of Ohio, } COLUMBIANA COUNTY, ss. }</p> <p>George Elliott having made application for a LICENSE, for Alexander McGregor and Mary A. Rose and being duly sworn, says that Alexander McGregor is of the age of twenty-one years, and has no wife living; and that Mary A. Rose is of the age of eighteen years, a resident of said County and has no husband living, and that said parties are not nearer kin than <sup>2d</sup> first-cou- sins and there is no legal impediment to said marriage.</p> <p>Sworn to and subscribed before me, this 8th day of Sept A. D. 1871</p> <p>George Elliott N. S. Randolph W. Clerk</p> <p><b>2</b></p>	<p>THE STATE OF OHIO, } Columbiana County, } ss.</p> <p>I certify, that on the 20th day of September A. D. 1871 N. S. Alexander McGregor AND Mrs. Mary A. Rose were, by me, legally joined in Mar- riage.</p> <p>Robert Hays <b>4</b></p> <p>Rec'd and recorded 23 Dec 1871 D. G. Kinsman Probate Judge.</p>
<p>PARTIES.</p> <p>Samuel J. White AND</p>	<p>The State of Ohio, } COLUMBIANA COUNTY, ss. }</p> <p>Samuel J. White having made application for a LICENSE, for himself and Laura J. White and being duly</p>	<p>THE STATE OF OHIO, } Columbiana County, } ss.</p> <p>I certify, that on the 5th day of Sept 1871</p>

Citation: "Ohio, County Marriages, 1789–2013," digital images, FamilySearch.org: accessed 14 April 2021), citing county courthouses, Ohio, entry for Alexander McGregor and Mary A. Rose: Columbiana, marriage records 1870-1876, vol. 6, image 76.

**1** The groom, Alexander McGregor, did not apply for the license, as indicated in the Affidavit section. The man who did, George Elliot, may be related to him.

**2** Handwritten notes may offer great clues. In this case, the note indicates that the bride and groom were second cousins.

**3** This is the return section of the Marriage Record book. If it is blank, the marriage may not have taken place.

**4** The record doesn't indicate whether Robert Hays was a minister or Justice of the Peace. Researching him may provide more information about the couple and their religious affiliation.

**5** The marriage record volume, kept by a county clerk, is a copy of the original records, and thus may contain mistakes. For example, other records state that the bride was Mary Jane, not Mary A.

See the online version of this article—including a second sample record <[www.familytreemagazine.com/records/vital/marriage-records-workbook](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/records/vital/marriage-records-workbook)>.

be held, start at Cyndi's List: Religion & Churches <[www.cyndislist.com/religion](http://www.cyndislist.com/religion)>, select the denomination you need then either "Births, Marriages and Deaths," or "Libraries, Museums and Archives."

### **MARRIAGE RECORD SUBSTITUTES**

If your ancestors were married in a county that suffered record loss or had lax registration requirements, look for evidence of the union in other records.

**Newspapers:** Nineteenth-century announcements usually mention the name of the bride and groom, the date and location of the wedding, and occasionally the name of the bride's father and the minister. Announcements from the 20th century are usually longer, with full names of the bride's and groom's parents and descriptions of the wedding and bridesmaids' dresses.

Find local newspapers at historical societies or online for free at Chronicling America <[chroniclingamerica.loc.gov](http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov)> or for a fee at GenealogyBank <[www.genealogybank.com](http://www.genealogybank.com)>, Newspapers.com <[www.newspapers.com](http://www.newspapers.com)> or NewspaperArchive <[www.newspaperarchive.com](http://www.newspaperarchive.com)>. Some states have posted newspapers or indexes online themselves, such as the Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection <[www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org](http://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org)> and Utah Digital Newspapers <[www.digitalnewspapers.org](http://www.digitalnewspapers.org)>. Search for other sites using the marriage location and the term *newspaper*, or use Elephind <[www.elephind.com](http://www.elephind.com)> to locate historical newspapers. Your local library also may provide access to regional historical newspapers.

**Church publications:** Many denominations in the United States sponsored their own publications. The *Presbyterian Banner* was published from 1860 and 1898 and included marriage notices in each issue. On RootsWeb, you can find a list of many religious newspapers

that have been transcribed and/or indexed. Transcribed records may also appear in local genealogical society publications.

**Censuses:** The 1900 and 1910 US federal censuses asked each person's marital status and the number of years married. An *M* indicates the person had been married once; an *M2* meant that person had been married twice. For a person who'd been married more than once, the number of years married referred to their current marriage.

**Death records:** Although death records won't provide a date or place of marriage, they may have clues to a woman's maiden name. If her certificate lists her father's name, his surname is usually (but not always) her maiden name. If the full names of a male decedent's parents are provided, you could then look for the couple's marriage record.

**Probate records:** Even if a parent's probate records list a daughter by her first name only, a married daughter would sign the required paperwork with her married name. Additionally, anything her parents bequeathed to her after her marriage would also belong to her husband, so both (and sometimes only the husband) would've signed the paperwork.

**Property records:** A married man couldn't sell his property without the consent of his wife. Both the husband and wife would be listed as grantors when selling the property, and the wife was usually questioned separately to confirm her consent to the sale. Researching property records is a useful tactic for couples who lived in the early 19th century, especially if the husband had a common name.

**Obituaries:** The name of a person's spouse will probably be included in an obituary, especially if the spouse was still living. You may find a notation of a woman's maiden name and/or the names of her parents. Find obituary clipping files at local historical societies or at websites like

the Cleveland Necrology File <[www.cpl.org/newsindex](http://www.cpl.org/newsindex)>. The original newspapers are another excellent source for obituaries.

**Bible records:** Family Bibles have long been sold with preprinted pages for births, marriages and deaths. Luckily, many families did enter this data in their family Bible. Note that dates may have been recorded long after the events occurred, leading to inaccuracies. Genealogical organizations have indexed or transcribed many Bible records. The Daughters of the American Revolution <[services.dar.org/Public/DAR\\_Research/search](http://services.dar.org/Public/DAR_Research/search)> and Bible Records Online <[www.biblerecords.com](http://www.biblerecords.com)> provide access to collections of Bible records. You may also find Bible records held by FamilySearch.

**Pension records:** A woman who applied for a widow's pension based on her husband's military service had to supply proof of marriage. To see if your ancestor applied for a pension, you can check the records at the subscription sites Fold3 <[www.fold3.com](http://www.fold3.com)> or Ancestry.com, or for free on FamilySearch.

**Reconstructed marriage records:** Unfortunately, courthouse disasters have affected many marriage records. To help researchers in those areas, genealogical societies and individuals have attempted to re-create lost records by using substitutes such as those listed here. If your ancestors' county suffered record losses, check with the local genealogical society or public library for published compilations of reconstructed records.

Searching for an ancestor's marriage record can take time: records may have been lost, destroyed or never even filed, and ancestors may not have married where we think they did. But the search is worth the effort for the goldmine of information contained in marriage records. ●

**Amanda Epperson**



# Death Records

Many genealogy experts recommend beginning with the *final* chapter of your ancestor's story—his death. After all, a death certificate or other death record represents the most recent evidence of your ancestor's life.

This guide will show you what's in a death record, how to find one, and what other records include the death information you seek.

## CLUES IN DEATH RECORDS

The death certificate is considered a primary source for the details of an ancestor's passing, such as the date, place and time of death. But it also can be a rich secondary source for an ancestor's life, providing clues to everything from birth and parents to spouse and last residence.

Such information on death records is considered less reliable because it comes from an informant—typically a spouse, child or other family member. Not only would the informant have been grieving, but he or she would have only second-hand knowledge of facts such as the deceased's date and place of birth or his parents' names. Research other sources to confirm the data a death record provides on a person's life.

Nonetheless, particularly from more recent years, a death certificate can deliver a wealth of information. The names you find in a death record can lead you to other relatives, and perhaps even push back your genealogical search by a generation. The name of the informant could also be exactly the clue you need to solve a maiden-name mystery.

Place names, however, can provide equally important clues: An ancestor's burial location can lead you to the cemetery, where previously unknown relatives may be in nearby graves.

A residential address can aid your search in census records, city directories or land records. Besides filling in blanks in your family tree, dates can point to other records—newspaper obituaries, passenger records, other vital records.

Even the cause of death can be helpful, whether in building a medical family history or (in cases of accidental or criminal causes) prompting a search for newspaper articles about the fatality.

## DEATH RECORD COVERAGE

Today we think of every death as being carefully scrutinized and recorded. Even if a deceased person didn't undergo the sort of medical examination common on TV shows such as "CSI," the death would have involved at least a funeral home and a sheaf of paperwork. And people in 21st-century

America are just as well-documented when they leave this world as when they arrive in it or get married.

Unfortunately, such meticulous recording hasn't always been the case. Depending on where and when, death records may be skimpy or even nonexistent. It's surprising in our data-dependent era to learn that some states didn't require recording of deaths until the first decade or so of the 20th century. Even after statewide registration began, compliance may have taken another few years.

But individual towns or counties may have started records much earlier than the states. Many New England towns started keeping death records in their earliest days, dating to the 17th century. In other places, major cities may have begun death registration well before the rest of the state. The information in early death records may vary widely from place to place.

Although privacy restrictions more commonly affect the availability of birth records, you may run into some such roadblocks with death certificates, too. Death certificates may be blocked for a period of years after the death, usually 20 to 50. Some states *completely* restrict access, regardless of how long ago the person died, to "qualified applicants" (usually those who are direct descendants or who need the information to prove provenance).

## ACCESSING DEATH RECORDS

The original repository for most death records was an office in the county where the death occurred, such as the health department or vital records office. Depending on the date of the record, you might get a copy there, or you can hit up another repository.

### Government Offices

Generally, you'll request copies of death records created after statewide death registration began from state vital records offices or health departments. You can find these offices' websites with a web search (*Ohio death certificates* or *Ohio vital records*, for example). Or consult the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's list of links to state vital records offices <[www.cdc.gov/nchs/w2w/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/w2w/index.htm)>.

County or city offices covering the place where the death occurred also may provide access to death records, and they may have fewer access restrictions and lower fees.

They'll also likely have any records kept before statewide death records began. Check the department of health website for the locality where the death took place for details.

Whether you request from the county or the state, follow the site's instructions for submitting your order. You may have to print a form to drop in the mail with a check, or submit an online form with a credit card number. Fees are generally modest, perhaps up to \$15. Usually, you'll have to provide at least the deceased's name at death and the date and place of death. If you know the death certificate number, supply that as well.

You can order the same records available at state vital records offices through third-party businesses such as VitalChek <[www.vitalchek.com](http://www.vitalchek.com)>. (In fact, in some states, this is your only option.)

Such businesses often provide faster service, but usually for a higher fee. Early death certificates may have been transferred to a state or county archive, library or historical society. The health department or vital records office website should inform you if this is the case, or you can consult local genealogy guides.

## Online

A handful of states and localities provide online access to digitized death records for at least some span of years. Arizona offers a searchable index of records from 1800 to 50 years ago, linked to PDFs of the originals <[www.azdhs.gov/licensing/vital-records/genealogy/index.php](http://www.azdhs.gov/licensing/vital-records/genealogy/index.php)>. Likewise, nearly a million Michigan death certificates are digitized at <[www.michiganology.org](http://www.michiganology.org)>.

You might find your ancestor in a death index, compiled by someone who looked through death records and extracted names, death dates and other pertinent details. Use this data to request the actual record. The index may have a link to order the record from the holding agency. If not, examine

the site for information on the source of the records and directions for ordering a copy or finding it on microfilm.

Death records or indexes are increasingly available online at FamilySearch <[www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)>. Click Search, then Records, where you can narrow by location via a clickable map of the United States. Click a state, then look for a death records title on the list in the resulting page. Some of the collections are still being added to, and not all are indexed.

The Social Security Death Index (SSDI), also on FamilySearch <[www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1202535](http://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1202535)>, is a quick way to find the death date and place of ancestors recent enough to have Social Security numbers. The collection begins in 1962, the year the database was computerized.

Most subscription genealogy sites have death records and indexes, most notably MyHeritage <[www.myheritage.com](http://www.myheritage.com)> and Ancestry.com <[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)>. Search these sites' list of collections by place, then scroll to see whether death records are available. Especially for New England ancestors, the American Ancestors subscription site <[www.americanancestors.org](http://www.americanancestors.org)> from the New England Historic Genealogical Society may have local death records.

To find other record collections and indexes, run a Google search on the city, county or state, *death records* and *genealogy*. Also check websites of the state archives and the state and local genealogical society. Search online for books containing death indexes, too.

## Microfilm

The Family History Library has microfilmed death records and indexes for locations across the country, and (as of writing) is in the process of digitizing all its microfilm. Search the FHL online catalog <[www.familysearch.org/search/catalog](http://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog)> for the place your ancestor may have died. State archives and local libraries also may have microfilmed records you can borrow through interlibrary loan.

## DEATH RECORD SUBSTITUTES

If your search for official death records fails, or you need to supplement skimpy information in what you've found, other resources can help. Of course, there are cemetery and tombstone records, but don't overlook funeral home, newspaper, church and even census records:

**Funeral records:** The information in these records may include names of family members, details of the funeral service and even the cost of burial. You may be able to identify the funeral home from the death certificate, newspaper obituary, cemetery records or family papers. A funeral home that nearby relatives used is a likely bet, or you can check city directories of the time for funeral homes near where the family lived.

## Fast Facts

**Coverage:** Varies by location, ranging from town settlement (17th-century New England) to statewide registration (as late as the 1910s)

**Jurisdiction where kept:** State department of health or vital statistics office; copies at state archives

**Key details:** Name of deceased; death date; names and birthplaces of spouse and/or parents; cause of death; burial location; last known residence

**Alternates and substitutes:** funeral records, newspapers, church records, coroner records, census mortality schedules, military records

# At a Glance: Death Certificate

**MISSOURI STATE BOARD OF HEALTH  
BUREAU OF VITAL STATISTICS  
CERTIFICATE OF DEATH**

Do not use this space.

1. PLACE OF DEATH  
 County Shelby Registration District No. 831  
 Township Black Creek Primary Registration District No. 6092  
 City (No. \_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ St. \_\_\_\_\_ Ward \_\_\_\_\_

2. FULL NAME Mary Susan Miller  
 (a) Residence, No. \_\_\_\_\_ St. \_\_\_\_\_ Ward \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Usual place of abode) (If nonresident, give city or town and State)  
 Length of residence in city or town where death occurred yrs. mos. ds. How long in U. S., if of foreign birth? yrs. mos. ds.

File No. 22056  
Registered No. \_\_\_\_\_

PERSONAL AND STATISTICAL PARTICULARS					MEDICAL CERTIFICATE OF DEATH	
3. SEX <u>Female</u>	4. COLOR OR RACE <u>White</u>	5. SINGLE, MARRIED, WIDOWED OR DIVORCED (write the word) <u>Widowed</u>			16. DATE OF DEATH (MONTH, DAY AND YEAR) <u>June 23 1933</u>	
5A. IF MARRIED, WIDOWED, OR DIVORCED HUSBAND OF (OR) WIFE OF <u>H. G. Miller</u>					17. I HEREBY CERTIFY, That I attended deceased from <u>June 20</u> , 19 <u>33</u> to <u>June 23</u> , 19 <u>33</u> that I last saw her alive on <u>June 20</u> , 19 <u>33</u> and that death occurred, on the date stated above, <u>6:00 a. m.</u>	
6. DATE OF BIRTH (MONTH, DAY AND YEAR) <u>Oct 12 - 1844</u>					THE CAUSE OF DEATH* WAS AS FOLLOWS: <u>Chronic suppurative</u> <u>nasopharyngitis</u>	
7. AGE	YEARS <u>88</u>	MONTHS <u>8</u>	DAYS <u>11</u>	IF LESS than 1 day, _____ hrs. or _____ min.		
8. OCCUPATION OF DECEASED (a) Trade, profession, or particular kind of work... <u>Housewife</u> (b) General nature of industry, business, or establishment in which employed (or employer)..... (c) Name of employer.....					CONTRIBUTORY (SECONDARY) (duration) _____ yrs. _____ mos. _____ ds.	
9. BIRTHPLACE (CITY OR TOWN) (STATE OR COUNTRY) <u>Shelbyville, Mo.</u>					18. WHERE WAS DISEASE CONTRACTED IF NOT AT PLACE OF DEATH..... DID AN OPERATION PRECEDE DEATH? _____ DATE OF _____ WAS THERE AN AUTOPSY? _____ WHAT TEST CONFIRMED DIAGNOSIS? <u>Chronic suppurative</u> (Signed) <u>N. J. ...</u> , M. D. (Address) <u>Shelbyville, Mo.</u>	
PARENTS	2. NAME OF FATHER <u>J. M. Collier</u>				*State the DISEASE CAUSING DEATH, or in deaths from VIOLENT CAUSES, state (1) MEANS AND NATURE OF INJURY, and (2) Whether ACCIDENTAL, SUICIDAL, or HOMICIDAL.	
	11. BIRTHPLACE OF FATHER (CITY OR TOWN) (STATE OR COUNTRY) <u>Mo.</u>				19. PLACE OF BURIAL, CREMATION, OR REMOVAL <u>J. O. B. Cemetery</u>	
	12. MAIDEN NAME OF MOTHER <u>Katherine Blackford</u>				DATE OF BURIAL <u>June 25 1933</u>	
13. BIRTHPLACE OF MOTHER (CITY OR TOWN) (STATE OR COUNTRY) <u>Ky.</u>				20. UNDERTAKER <u>W. Thompson Son</u>		
14. INFORMANT (Address) <u>Mrs. Anna Forman</u> <u>Shelbyville, Mo.</u>					ADDRESS <u>Shelbyville</u>	
15. FILED <u>June 24 1933</u> <u>Ernest H. Howard</u> REGISTRAR						

Citation: Missouri Death Certificates, 1910–1962, No. 22056, Mary Susan Miller; digital image, Missouri Digital Heritage, Missouri State Archives ([s1.sos.mo.gov/records/archives/archivesmvc/deathcertificates](http://s1.sos.mo.gov/records/archives/archivesmvc/deathcertificates); accessed 22 June 2021).

**1** Take note of the deceased's marital status as well as spouse's name. This is evidence that Mary's husband, H.G. Miller, died before June 1933.

**2** Sometimes death records provide useful clues for research on earlier ancestors, such as the name and birthplace of the deceased's father.

**3** Sources for finding a mother's maiden name can be scarce. But now you can follow up searching for Blackfords in Kentucky, and for a marriage record for Katherine and J.M. Collier.

last name is different from the deceased's maiden and married names. How is she related—possibly a married daughter?

**4** An informant's name can provide clues: This informant's

**5** The name of the undertaker can help you find funeral-home records that could contain more information.

See the expanded, online version of this article—including a bonus example of an obituary <[www.familytreemagazine.com/records/vital/death-records-workbook](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/records/vital/death-records-workbook)>.

A printed directory to US funeral homes, which your library or a cooperative local funeral director may have, is *The American Blue Book of Funeral Directors* (Kates-Boylston). Historical societies and libraries in your ancestor's hometown also might help you track down funeral homes, especially those that've been absorbed by other homes.

**Newspapers:** The local newspaper may have recorded your ancestor's passing in the form of a death notice listing just the basic facts, or an obituary with details about his life and family. The proliferation of online digitized newspapers can help you find these. Try Ancestry.com and its sibling site Newspapers.com <[www.newspapers.com](http://www.newspapers.com)>, both of which require a subscription; subscription site GenealogyBank <[www.genealogybank.com](http://www.genealogybank.com)>; and the free Chronicling America site from the Library of Congress <[chroniclingamerica.loc.gov](http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov)>.

**Church records:** Many churches recorded the deaths of their members in funeral registers. Your research strategy for these records varies by the religion. Your best bet is to contact the place of worship your ancestor attended. If it no longer exists, contact the parish that absorbed it or a regional office for the faith. You also might find church records at FamilySearch.

**Coroner records:** Deaths occurring by accident or under suspicious circumstances may have been subject to a coroner's investigation. The death certificate and newspaper articles may indicate such a death. Coroner records may be at the county morgue, historical society or state archives. Old coroner records are online, at least in index form.

**Census mortality schedules:** US census mortality schedules for 1850, 1860, 1870 and 1880 name those who died in the 12 months prior to the census date (June 1) for these censuses. Find mortality schedules on Ancestry.com. The 1850 schedule is searchable free on FamilySearch.

**Military records:** For ancestors who died in military service, search the Nationwide Grave Locator <[gravelocator.cem.va.gov](http://gravelocator.cem.va.gov)>, which lists burials in Veterans Administration National Cemeteries, state veterans cemeteries, other military and Department of Interior cemeteries, and veterans buried in private cemeteries with government grave markers furnished after 1997.

One way or another, your ancestor's final chapter is out there for you to read. And what you find out about his death may open a whole new window in learning about his life. ●

**David A. Fryxell**

# Work It Out

Keep your research  
in order with these  
top-of-the-line  
genealogy worksheets.

by THE EDITORS OF FAMILY TREE MAGAZINE

Even the best-laid plans of mice, men and genealogists can go awry without an organized way of documenting your research.

These seven worksheets will keep your research on track and in order. We've provided tips and tricks for using each. Write directly in the magazine, or make a photocopy.

You can find more great, downloadable genealogy worksheets on our website <[www.familytreemagazine.com/freeforms](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/freeforms)>.

- Family Group Sheet
- Five-Generation Ancestor Chart
- Ancestor Worksheet
- Surname Variant Chart
- Oral History Interview Record
- Census Checklist
- Passenger List Search Worksheet

# Family Group Sheet

Look at one family unit (parents, children and subsequent spouses) in detail.

The \_\_\_\_\_ Family

## Husband

Source # \_\_\_\_\_

Full Name \_\_\_\_\_

Birth Date \_\_\_\_\_ Place \_\_\_\_\_

Marriage Date \_\_\_\_\_ Place \_\_\_\_\_

Death Date \_\_\_\_\_ Place \_\_\_\_\_

Burial \_\_\_\_\_

His Father \_\_\_\_\_

His Mother with Maiden Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Wife

Full Name \_\_\_\_\_

Birth Date \_\_\_\_\_ Place \_\_\_\_\_

Death Date \_\_\_\_\_ Place \_\_\_\_\_

Burial \_\_\_\_\_

Her Father \_\_\_\_\_

Her Mother with Maiden Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Other Spouses

Full Name \_\_\_\_\_

Marriage Date and Place \_\_\_\_\_

Full Name \_\_\_\_\_

Marriage Date and Place \_\_\_\_\_

Include cross-references to records so you can easily source data.

Make a note if you've also created a Family Group Sheet for this couple's children.

Children of This Marriage	Birth Date and Place	Death and Burial Dates and Places	Spouse and Marriage Date and Place

# Five-Generation Ancestor Chart

Perhaps the most famous format for family trees, this chart allows you to view multiple generations of an individual's direct-line ancestors at once.



Learn how to chart adoptive families, step-families and other "non-traditional" family arrangements <[www.familytreemagazine.com/premium/genealogy-chart-faqs](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/premium/genealogy-chart-faqs)>.

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

birth date and place

marriage date and place

death date and place

birth date and place

marriage date and place

death date and place

spouse

birth date and place

marriage date and place

death date and place

birth date and place

marriage date and place

death date and place

birth date and place

marriage date and place

death date and place

birth date and place

marriage date and place

death date and place

birth date and place

marriage date and place

death date and place

tip

You'll recognize this chart as one of the default views from online family trees. It's called the "Pedigree" view at Ancestry.com and MyHeritage, and the "Landscape" view on FamilySearch.org.

Label your five-generation ancestor charts to help you keep track of this frequently used worksheet.

Chart # \_\_\_\_

1 on this chart = \_\_\_\_ on chart # \_\_\_\_

8	16	see chart #
_____	17	<input type="checkbox"/>
birth date and place	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	18	
marriage date and place	19	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	20	<input type="checkbox"/>
death date and place	21	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	22	
_____	23	<input type="checkbox"/>
birth date and place	24	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	25	<input type="checkbox"/>
death date and place	26	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	27	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	28	<input type="checkbox"/>
birth date and place	29	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	30	<input type="checkbox"/>
marriage date and place	31	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____		
death date and place		
11		
_____		
birth date and place		
_____		
death date and place		
12		
_____		
birth date and place		
_____		
marriage date and place		
_____		
death date and place		
13		
_____		
birth date and place		
_____		
death date and place		
14		
_____		
birth date and place		
_____		
marriage date and place		
_____		
death date and place		
15		
_____		
birth date and place		
_____		
death date and place		

Make a note about what other five-generation ancestor charts are associated with each ancestor. Then, you can link charts to create a chain that stretches back even further.

# Ancestor Worksheet

Record in one place all the information you have about a person in your family tree.

Full Name (Maiden Name for Women): \_\_\_\_\_

Social Security Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Nicknames and Alternate Names: \_\_\_\_\_

Surname Spelling Variations: \_\_\_\_\_

 Track spelling variations in the Surname Variant Chart.

## Birth and Baptism

Birth Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Birth Place: \_\_\_\_\_

Baptism Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Baptism Place: \_\_\_\_\_

## Marriage(s) and Divorce(s)

Name of Spouse(s)	Marriage Date(s)	Marriage Place(s)

Name of Spouse(s)	Divorce Date(s)	Divorce Place(s)

## Death

Death Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Death Place: \_\_\_\_\_

Burial Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Burial Church/Place: \_\_\_\_\_

Obituary Date(s) and Newspaper(s): \_\_\_\_\_

## Military Service

Conflict (if applicable)	Unit	Dates/Years



# Surname Variant Chart

Keep track of your ancestral surnames, plus the different ways you've found them spelled in records and record indexes.

<b>Surname</b>			
<b>Place of Origin</b>			
<b>Phonetic Variants</b>			
<b>Possible Variations into English</b>			
<b>Surname Suffixes</b> (-son, -datter, etc.)			
<b>Other Spellings/ Variants</b>			

Names weren't changed at Ellis Island, but they may have been misheard by a non-native speaker at your ancestor's point of departure. Use this field to track some possible ways a surname may have been misheard and misspelled.



An unusual last name may actually be a blessing. David A. Fryxell shares six tips for researching ancestors who have atypical surnames <[www.familytreemagazine.com/premium/unusual-last-names](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/premium/unusual-last-names)>.





# Passenger List Search Worksheet

Keep your ancestor's departure and arrival information handy.

## Migration Information

Estimate Departure Date: \_\_\_\_\_ From Which Country/Region? \_\_\_\_\_

Possible Departure Ports: \_\_\_\_\_

Ship Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age at Immigration: \_\_\_\_\_

Estimated Arrival Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Possible Arrival Ports: \_\_\_\_\_

## Possible Traveling Companions

Name	Sex	Age

Study the history of your ancestor's homeland to determine what country it may have been part of during his/her lifetime.

## Sources to Check

Source or Database	Repository or Website	Date Searched

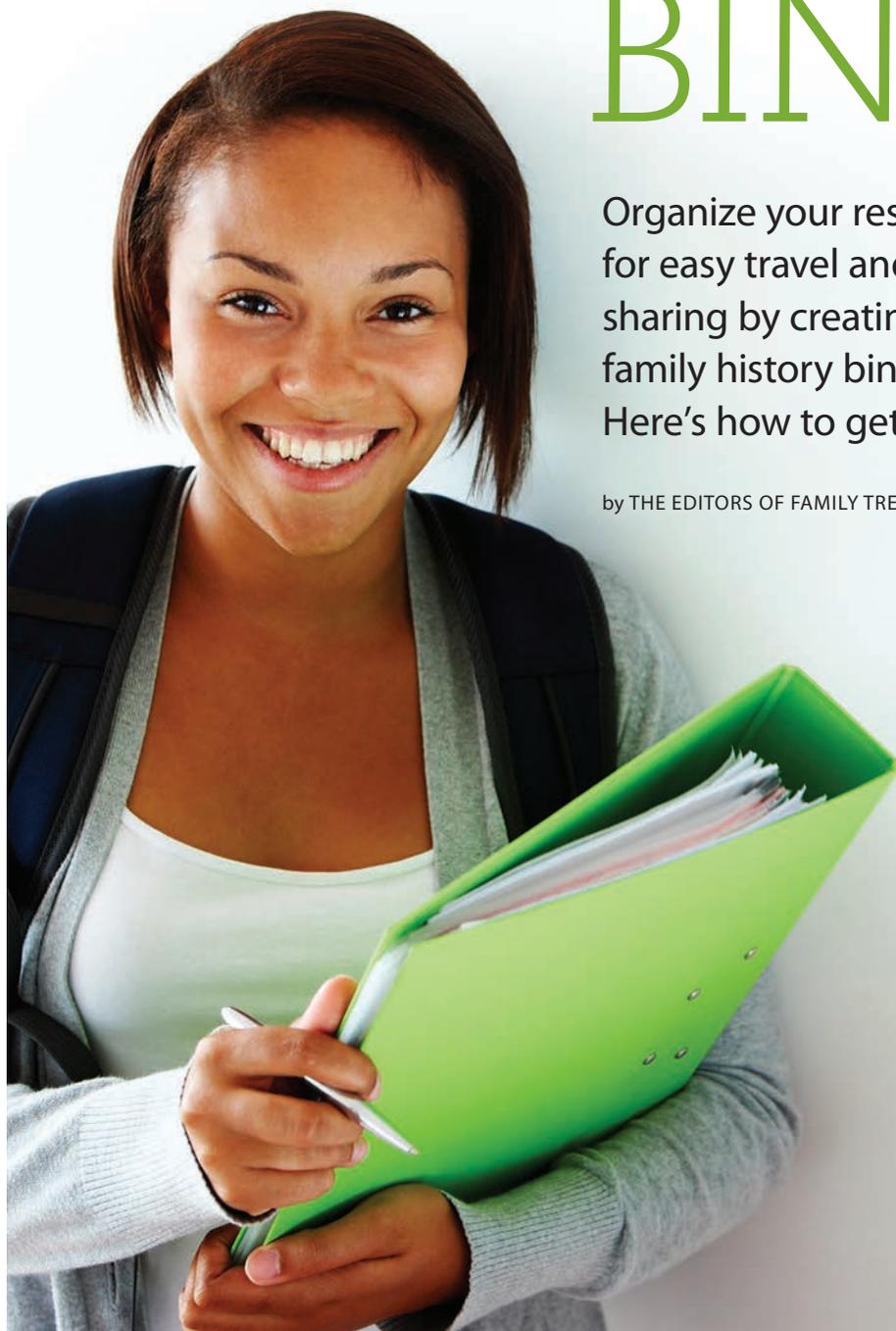
**tip**

Use this template in conjunction with the Ancestor Worksheet. When researching passenger lists, you'll need to reference your immigrant ancestor's name, birth date and birthplace, as well as information about his or her spouse and children.

# TIES that BIND

Organize your research for easy travel and sharing by creating family history binders. Here's how to get started.

by THE EDITORS OF FAMILY TREE MAGAZINE



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**Dog people versus cat people**, team Mac versus team PC, even how to put toilet paper on the roll (in front of or behind)—no matter the subject, people will find ways of dividing themselves. And genealogists are no exception, getting drawn into a feud with just as much passion: whether to organize research into binders, or folders.

Folders certainly have their advantages, and we've covered filing systems based on folders <[www.familytreemagazine.com/organization/5-genealogy-filing-systems](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/organization/5-genealogy-filing-systems)>. But organizing research in binders makes it easier to transport and share with others, particularly those who might be newer to family history.

Of course, the binder-versus-folder debate is not a zero-sum game: You can use both types of storage. Perhaps you store your research in folders, but prepare a binder for a specific purpose such as sharing research or handing information over to a client. You could also use *neither* binders nor folders, preferring to keep your system 100% digital.

We're not here to take sides. But we do want to share some guidance on how to put together a family history research binder. These six simple steps will get you started.

---

1

## GATHER YOUR SUPPLIES

The first thing to consider is what kind of binder you want to use. If your binder is meant to be passed around and shared, you may want to opt for more durable materials. But if you intend to store and archive your binder, you should consider using archival-grade materials that are less likely to deteriorate on their own.

Because of this, the amount and type of materials you will need depend on the goal and scale of your specific project. So you'll need to determine how you'll be using the binder, where it will be stored, and how large you'd like it to be before buying supplies.

Here's a basic list of what all you'll need to begin your project:

- 3-ring binder
- Document sleeves or sheet protectors
- Tabs or dividers
- Blank paper or family tree templates and/or printouts of research
- Photos



2

## CHOOSE YOUR ORGANIZATIONAL METHOD

This is the trickiest part! The best organizational method will depend on your goal and family structure. But here are five filing systems we recommend in <[www.familytreemagazine.com/organization/5-genealogy-filing-systems](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/organization/5-genealogy-filing-systems)>:

- **Ancestral:** This basic filing system organizes around a single family, beginning with one individual and including records of all his ancestors through a certain number

of generations. Each binder begins with a pedigree chart, then is followed by a section for each ancestor (organized by birth date and/or generation) in that chart, along with accompanying records.

- **Married Couple:** This system focuses on family units, with each binder (or, for smaller families, subsections within a binder) documenting a married couple and their descendants. You'll begin with a family group sheet or descendant report. Subsections are organized by ancestor.

- **Surname:** If you're still in the thick of your research, you might want a system more flexible to new discoveries. In this method, each binder covers a surname—regardless of what family unit the individual came from. Subsections are for record type, rather than specific ancestor, so you might label sections *SMITH: Birth*, then *SMITH: Census*, and so on. (Note: File records for married women by their maiden names, as that's how they'll appear in reports and charts.)

- **Geographic:** Each binder has a dedicated region or state, with records sorted by surname or subject. You can further subdivide by record group, or include sections for separate counties or provinces. This is useful if you're sampling a few records from multiple places or documents that cover wide areas.

- **Record Type:** Place all documents of a particular kind in one binder, with subsections for surname or other identifiers (such as record year). This can be useful for documents like censuses that contain several people. Create a catchall binder for unusual resources, such as oral history interview transcripts, letters from modern relatives, or a relative's memoir.

You can also mix-and-match your binder methods. For example, if you wanted to document the ancestors of John Smith, you could create a binder for him that begins with his records, then has separate sections for each

of his ancestors (his father, mother, paternal grandfather, paternal grandmother, maternal grandfather, maternal grandmother, and so on).

But what to do with census records, which will likely mention multiple members of the family? You could create a separate binder that collects one kind of record—censuses—and sort it by year or place. Then you could include references to that binder in your Smith family binder. (For example: “The Robert and Mary Smith census record for 1930 appears on page 5 of the binder titled *Springfield Census Records*.”)

Note: For simplicity's sake, the rest of the article will follow how to create a binder using that first Ancestral method, but many of the principles will apply to other systems as well.

### 3 FILL OUT A PEDIGREE CHART

Knowing which ancestors to include in your binder is an important step, as it will give an outline to your project and (in the Ancestral method) will serve as a kind of “table of contents” for your binder. Using a templated five-generation ancestor chart (like the one we have for free at [www.familytreemagazine.com/freebie/five-generationancestorchart](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/freebie/five-generationancestorchart)) will help.

In her book *Family History 101* (Family Tree Books), author Marcia Melnyk shares a few tips for how to fill out a pedigree chart:

- **Write surnames in capital letters:** The all-caps approach lets you (or someone reading your charts) immediately distinguish last names from first and middle names.

- **If you know middle names, spell them out:** Naturally, this helps you distinguish Grandpa William *Randolph* Reynolds from Grandpa William *Robert* Reynolds.

- **Always record nicknames,** denoting them in quotations. You want to show your ancestors' full identities, so you can match up family history to the right relative.

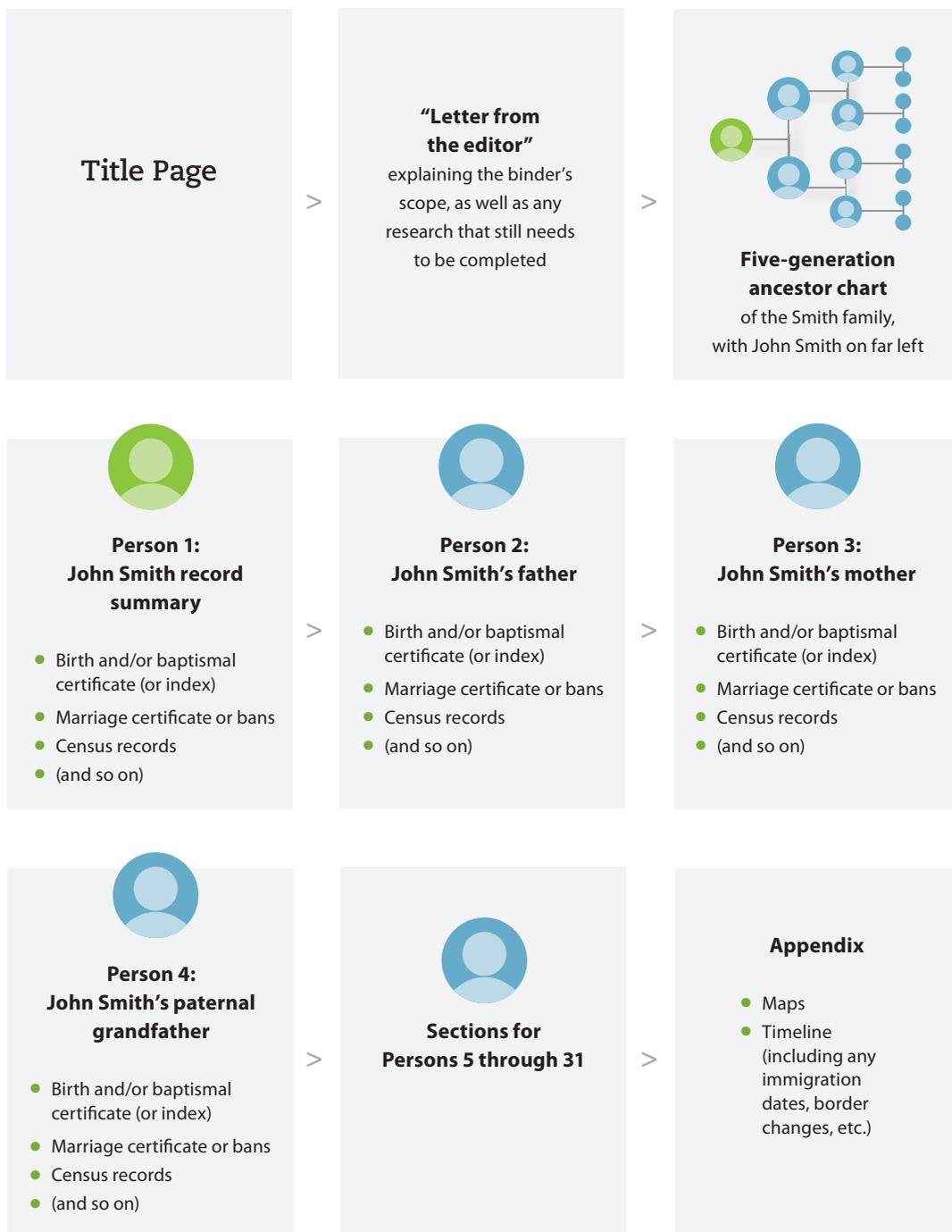
- **List women's maiden names,** not their married names. Since you're recording your female ancestors right next to their husbands, including their married names is redundant.



Find a downloadable version of this guide at [www.familytreemagazine.com/freebie/how-to-make-a-family-history-binder-printable-guide](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/freebie/how-to-make-a-family-history-binder-printable-guide).

## Sample Binder Organization

Say you want to create a binder that tracks five generations of John Smith's family, from him to his great-great-grandparents. Here's how you might outline that binder:



- **Format dates as *day, month, full year*.** For consistency, genealogists usually write dates in the “European” style, flipflopping the American convention of *month, day, year*. So, for example, the day the Declaration of Independence was ratified should be written as *4 JUL 1776* rather than *July 4, 1776* or *7/4/1776*. Notice, also, the use of the abbreviated, all-caps month rather than a numeral.

## 4 CREATE SECTION OPENERS

After you’ve completed your pedigree chart, it’s time to outline for the rest of your binder. For our example, that means building out sections for individual ancestors.

You might find it helpful to begin each ancestor’s section with some sort of fact sheet or biography. Make sure to include the person’s birth, marriage and death dates; any known residences; names and birth dates of any children; and other genealogically relevant details that might generate records (e.g., occupation or military service). You’ll want to make sure you’re consistent in how you begin each section.

We have an Ancestor Research Worksheet that includes many of the needed introductory details in a quick, at-a-glance format <[www.familytreemagazine.com/freebie/researchworksheet](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/freebie/researchworksheet)>. Other options include a short narrative summary of the person’s life, or even a family group sheet.

## 5 ADD AND TRACK RECORDS

Once you’ve gathered facts and biographical information for each ancestor, it’s time to create a personal record inventory. This is a detailed list of each kind of record you’ve found for an ancestor, from birth to death.

After this summary, add photocopies of any and all of those records, in chronological order. You can three-hole-punch them if more convenient, but make sure not to punch out any details. (And remember that any original

When organizing your binder, you may find that a system for numbering your ancestors will come in handy. Drew Smith explores some options in <[www.familytreemagazine.com/organization/genealogy-numbering-systems](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/organization/genealogy-numbering-systems)>.

materials should be placed in archival-safe page protectors.) Avoid stapling or gluing materials together, as this will make it more difficult to turn pages—and potentially damage items. Add a note indicating where the original record (if available) is stored.

For oversized or fragile documents, keep copies in a binder and originals in separate archival storage. Save space and supplies by filing multiple-page (or otherwise related) documents in the same sheet protector. But don’t file fragile originals or materials of different types (such as photos and newsprint) together.

Once you’ve created your first section, repeat steps 4 and 5 for each ancestor in your pedigree chart. Having a consistent structure within each section will make it easier to quickly find materials.

## 6 ASSEMBLE YOUR BINDER

Time to put it all together! Remember to label the binder’s spine with the appropriate surname, and label tabbed dividers for easy reference.

Here are a few other ideas for additional sections and elements you can include:

- a “note from the editor” to explain the scope of your research
- a notes page (either within each section for details that don’t fit nicely into a records inventory, or at the end of the binder for future discoveries)
- a dedicated photos section (useful if photos have multiple ancestors in them)
- maps
- timelines or other information about the time and period the family lived

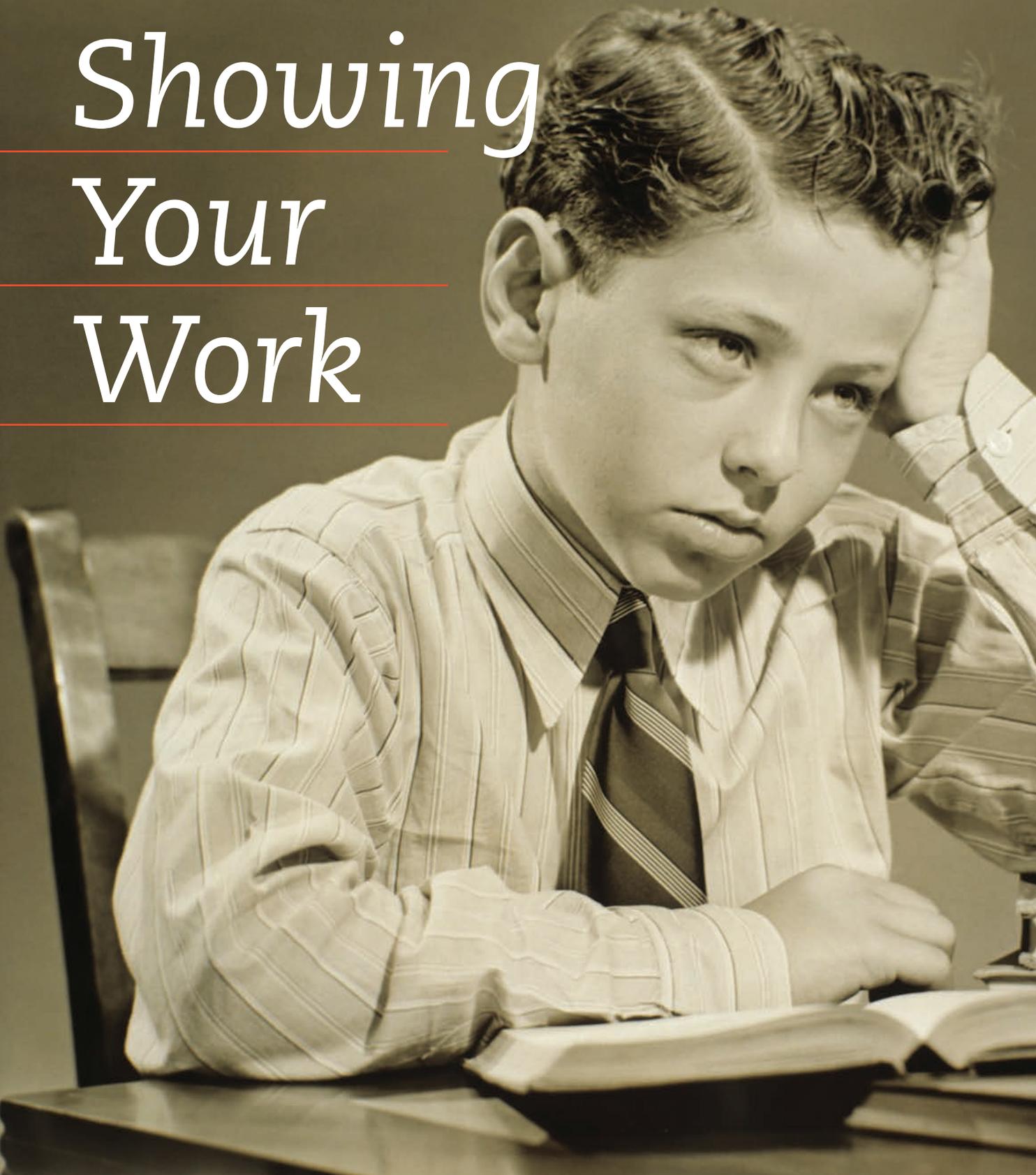
And there you have it! Now you can proudly show off your completed project at the next holiday gathering or family reunion. ●

# *Showing Your Work*

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Though not glamorous, citing your sources can reap great rewards for your research. Here's how to start.

by ANDREW KOCH

**Eating green vegetables.** Flossing your teeth. Hitting the gym. These things are good for us, but that doesn't mean we're excited to do them.

To me, there's no clearer family history equivalent of finishing your broccoli than citing sources. Creating accurate source citations can be dull and take lots of time, and—though they might acknowledge the importance of doing so—many researchers are unsure how they should start.

The good news is that, with reference books and online tools, adequately citing sources has never been easier. Citation is built right into the most popular tree-building tools, from Ancestry.com's Member Trees <[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)> to the RootsMagic desktop software <[www.rootsmagic.com](http://www.rootsmagic.com)>. And services like EasyBib <[www.easybib.com](http://www.easybib.com)> can generate citations for you in a variety of styles.

Let's take a look at source citations: why you need them, what to include, and how to decide what format you should record them in.

## WHY SOURCE CITATIONS

At a very basic level, source citations help someone viewing your research understand where you got your information. And you can cite all kinds of sources, from books to online records to interviews to emails.

In case you need some convincing, source citations will help your research by:

- **Adding credibility:** Source citations “show your work,” demonstrating to others where you found information and how you reached your conclusions. This holds you accountable, disclosing your sources and allowing your readers to evaluate how reliable they are. This is particularly true if you're hoping to publish research, or are seeking credentials from a body like the Board for Certification of Genealogists (BCG).

- **Re-tracing information:** If you're ever questioned on a fact or need to resolve conflicting details, citations give you a quick path to revisiting your documents. This will save you valuable time, especially when you come back to research after an extended period.

- **Identifying new records:** By being intentional in documenting your sources, you'll begin to notice if you're overly reliant on one particular resource. This can be your invitation to seek out other resources to diversify your research, especially if (for example) you find you've

### tip

When deciding how much detail to include in source citations, err on the side of too much. You can always strip out information depending on what style guide or format you're publishing in.

# Sample Source Citations

Your source citations will vary based on type of record and what system you're using, but here are a few samples to get you started. The different colors indicate different types of information.

You can download a two-page chart listing what details to include in citations for various types of records at <[www.familytreemagazine.com/freebie/free-genealogy-source-documentation-guide](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/freebie/free-genealogy-source-documentation-guide)>.

Record type	Citation
Census return microfilm image, accessed online	1940 US Census, Washington, DC, population schedule, enumeration district 1-74, sheet 61a, entry for Franklin D. Roosevelt; digital image, Ancestry.com ( <a href="http://ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/2442/images/M-T0627-00555-00418">ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/2442/images/M-T0627-00555-00418</a> ; accessed 2 June 2021); citing National Archives and Records Administration microfilm T627, Washington, DC, 1940.
Death register microfilm image, accessed online	"Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh City Deaths, 1870-1905," microfilm 505841, DGS number 4672714, image 126 of 695, page 602, death register for Peter Joyce; digital image, FamilySearch ( <a href="http://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:939V-8QSW-62">www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:939V-8QSW-62</a> ; accessed 3 Jun 2021); citing Allegheny County Courthouse, Pittsburgh, Penn., 1888.
Photograph from online collection	"FDR [Franklin Delano Roosevelt]," glass negative, Harris & Ewing Collection, 1938; digital photograph, US Library of Congress Online Catalog, Harris & Ewing Collection ( <a href="http://www.loc.gov/item/2016883801">www.loc.gov/item/2016883801</a> ; accessed 3 June 2021); held by Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC, call number LC-H21-C-820 [P&P].

## KEY:

● Title/Description

● Year of Creation/Publication

● Website Access Information

● Location within Collection

● Format

● Physical Repository Information

only been using indexes and should seek out original records.

- **Giving credit where it's due:** Genealogy is all about collaboration. By referencing the websites, societies, archives, record collections, and fellow researchers who have helped you along the way, you're essentially saying "thanks"—plus acting as a referral to others.

- **Grounding your research:** Well-formatted source citations are the same no matter where you're working: online family trees, desktop software programs, or even a hand-written journal. As your work moves to new platforms or across multiple devices, your citations (if kept consistently) will help anchor your research.

The scholarly best practice is to cite any fact that isn't common knowledge. Everyone knows that George Washington was the first US president under the Constitution, so you don't need to cite a source when stating that. But how was

his estate, Mount Vernon, laid out? And who was Washington's next-in-command during the French and Indian War? Those details require research, and thus would need to be cited.

## WHAT TO INCLUDE

The length and format of a source citation (including what details are in it) will vary based on the document or publication you're citing. A citation for a government-created record, for example, will look significantly different from one for a printed book.

As a result, it's crucial to study the source in question: where it comes from, when it was created and by whom, and how it's being accessed. In <[www.familytreemagazine.com/organization/5-elements-source-citation](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/organization/5-elements-source-citation)> (based on the work of Thomas W. Jones), Shannon Combs-Bennett outlines the five basic details that a source citation should include, regardless of type of source:

## Source citations “show your work,” demonstrating to others where you found information and how you reached your conclusions.

1. *Who created the information* (e.g., an author, an editor, a transcriber or a government)
2. *What the source is*: the title (e.g., for a book) or a description of what kind of document the item is
3. *When the source was created and/or published*
4. *Where in the larger work the information is* (e.g., a page number)
5. *Where the source is* (i.e., where it is physically or online)

Let’s look at an example. For a US passenger list, you’d want to include:

1. *Who*: the US Department of Labor Immigration Service (which created the original record) or the National Archives (which houses microfilms of the record)
2. *What*: a passenger arrival list, with a note about what format the list was viewed in
3. *When*: the year the immigration took place
4. *Where in*: the location of the list within the larger collection (e.g., the date, if the collection is organized chronologically), plus line number
5. *Where at*: the name of the archive that holds the record (in this case, the National Archives and Records Administration), plus where you accessed the image

Note that last piece: In addition to *type* of source, your citations will also document *how you accessed it*—the format in which you viewed the source. So a citation for a passenger list will look different if you requested a copy from the National Archives versus viewing a microfilm at a library versus finding an image on FamilySearch <[www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)>.

### tip

Don’t settle for the collection descriptions on sites like Ancestry.com and FamilySearch. These are generally not consistent from one collection to the next, nor do they have all the details needed for a proper citation. Take the information from them and apply to your own system instead.



Check out an in-depth tutorial for citing sources using popular family tree-builders <[www.familytreemagazine.com/organization/genealogy-software-source-citations](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/organization/genealogy-software-source-citations)>.

In other words, if you viewed a digital image of a microfilmed passenger list on FamilySearch, you’d want to include information about the digital source *as well as* the physical source used to create it: what format the record was in, the website’s URL, and when you accessed it.

You might make additional notes to clarify how the digital source came to be. For example, many of the National Archives’ records have been digitized or otherwise made available by FamilySearch or commercial sites like Ancestry.com <[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)>.

So the full source citation for a passenger list image viewed on FamilySearch might look like this:

“New York Passenger Arrival List (Ellis Island), 1892–1924,” roll 2945, volume 6740–6741, *S.S. Rotterdam*, 2 April 1921, line 8 (entry for Albert Einstein); digital image, FamilySearch ([www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C95R-49LQ-T](http://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C95R-49LQ-T); accessed 3 June 2021); citing National Archives and Records Administration microfilm T715, Washington, DC.

As you can see, making a citation requires you to learn quite a bit about where a source comes from. We’ve included a few more samples in the previous page’s sidebar.

### HOW TO FORMAT

You may feel anxious approaching source citations because you don’t know what format to put them in. But take some solace in the fact that there is no *single* citation system that will work for all sources in all situations, nor one that should be used by all researchers.

You can certainly take advantage of tried-and-true templates. Elizabeth Shown Mills’ 892-page

tome *Evidence Explained: History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace* (Genealogical Publishing Co.) is widely considered the gold standard of genealogy source citation, with samples for just about every resource you can think of. (Mills has great resources on her website, too <[www.evidenceexplained.com](http://www.evidenceexplained.com)>.) Some publications or organizations will have their own style guides, such as the BCG *Genealogy Standards* or the Notes and Bibliography (NB) System of the Chicago Manual of Style.

## Types of Citations

Another factor to consider when developing your citation template: where you'll be including citations, be it in research logs, online family trees, narrative histories, books or even on paper copies of records themselves. The length and format will be dictated, in part, on how much space you have, and how you'll be documenting sources in relation to the rest of the work (e.g., if you're writing a narrative and want to cite sources in the text as you go).

In general, source-documentation will take one of three forms: in-text citations, footnotes/endnotes, or a bibliography.

- **In-text**, or parenthetical, citations are used to cite the source for a fact within the narrative of written projects. A citation (usually in some abbreviated format) is indicated in parentheses after the associated fact. A longer citation is generally included at the end of the work in a bibliography (see below).

- **Footnotes** or **endnotes** also refer the reader to a source from within text, but via a superscript<sup>1</sup> and to a citation somewhere else in the document. At the bottom of the page (in the footnote) or at the end of the document (in the endnote), you cite your source in full. If you reference the same source again within a project, you may not need to include the full citation; many style guides allow for abbreviated citations upon second (and further) reference. This is considered the most thorough method, since it allows you to link full citation directly to facts.

- A **source list** (or **bibliography**) simply compiles all your sources in one place, usually sorting them alphabetically by author or title. Each listing in a bibliography will closely resemble the first-reference footnote/endnote citation, but there may be differences in how information is organized.

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<sup>1</sup> The small number indicates either a footnote (at the bottom of the page) or an end note (at the end of a document). For the purposes of in-text source citations, this is where you'd add your citation entry.

But having said that, most genealogists can develop a system that suits their own needs. In fact, your source citation is effective as long as someone reviewing your research can successfully identify where you got your information.

Here are some quick tips for making your own source-citation system:

- Create a document that explains your system and includes examples. Note-taking services like Evernote <[www.evernote.com](http://www.evernote.com)> or word-processing programs like Google Docs <[docs.google.com](http://docs.google.com)> can help.

- Use punctuation to separate items. Most systems call for commas or semicolons between data points, plus a period at the end.

- Create templates, especially for commonly used sources. This will help you quickly create consistent citations. (For example: Do you *always* include the full URL for a web-based source, or just the URL for the collection's page?)

- Determine where you'd like to include citations. Do you have plans to publish your work? If so, make sure your system complies with the publication's style guide or an industry standard like the Genealogical Proof Standard (GPS).

- Try to anticipate special cases. Prepare for scenarios where you'll need to cite (for example) a whole family's record instead of just one person's entry.

- Anticipate missing information. Not all sources will have all the details you expect, so determine how you'll handle situations in which you don't have details like an author name or a page number.

- Borrow from existing systems. You don't need to reinvent the wheel, so consider adapting standard styles for your own use rather than trying to build from scratch. Elizabeth Shown Mills outlines her system in *Evidence Explained* and in abbreviated form in *Evidence!* (both Genealogical Publishing Co.). It's based in the Chicago Manual of Style.

So, editor's orders: Make source citations as you go. They won't help you lose weight, build strong bones, or prevent gingivitis, but they might just save you some heartache. ●

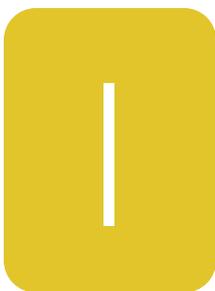
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**Andrew Koch** is the editor of *Family Tree Magazine*. Many moons ago as a writing tutor in college, he had to learn source-citation templates for multiple manuals of style.

# Your-Digital-Files.jpg

Clean up your computer with this guide to managing and labeling digital files.

by RICK CRUME



If you do much family history research, you've probably accumulated hundreds—maybe even thousands—of digital files: historical records, excerpts from books you have found online, scanned family photographs and pictures of gravestones made with a digital camera. With all that data, keeping your digital files organized can feel like an overwhelming task.

You need a standard system for organizing those records—plus some way to label photographs with names, dates and places. You also need to be able to find a particular record or photograph when you need it. Read on for tips and tools that will help bring order to all the family history files on your computer.

## ADD CUSTOM NAMES TO ELECTRONIC FILES.

When you scan a photograph or find a historical record online, save the file to your computer with a descriptive name. The default names generated for most files (e.g., “IMG\_0001”) won't be meaningful to your research or help you find the file later. Instead, take some time to create custom file names.

While really long file names can become unwieldy, you should include enough information so you can see—at a glance—what the file is. You'll also need to be mindful of your device's character limits—file names in Windows 10, for example, can only be 260 characters long.

But you don't just want your file names to be descriptive—you also want them to be consistent. Create a standard file-naming system so your files are listed in an order that's useful for your purposes. For example, you could name files:

- **By surname:** This makes it easy to jump to files pertaining to a particular branch of your family or to a specific person.





## While really long file names can become unwieldy, you should include enough information so you can see—at a glance—what the file is.

- **By place:** If you have records that cover various surnames in the same localities, you might find it easier to label/sort your files by locale. Be consistent in how you indicate places—for example, use either full state names or abbreviations.

- **By date:** I'm writing a biography of a relative and it's helpful to have all my sources, including many newspaper articles, in chronological order.

When naming files, use *just* letters, numbers, hyphens and underscores. Don't use spaces, periods, parentheses, brackets or special characters, such as !, & or #. (Not all programs and devices can process files with these characters in their names.)



Organize your files—both paper and digital—with these nine habits <[www.familytreemagazine.com/organization/9-habits-of-highly-organized-genealogists](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/organization/9-habits-of-highly-organized-genealogists)>.

Here, newspaper articles are named in such a way that they're sorted chronologically by date of publication.

1900-12-09-MA-Boston-Herald-Page-13-GeneralogyBank  
1901-04-26-NY-Rome-Daily-Sentinel-Page-4-Old-Fulton-NY-Post-Cards  
1901-04-26-NY-Troy-Times-Page-2-GeneralogyBank  
1901-04-26-NY-Watertown-Daily-Times-Page-2-GeneralogyBank  
1901-04-27-NJ-Trenton-Evening-Times-Page-7-GeneralogyBank  
1901-04-27-PA-Lebanon-Daily-News-Page-2-Newspapers-com  
1901-04-28-PA-Philadelphia-Inquirer-Page-11-GeneralogyBank  
1901-05-01-NY-Hornell-Evening-Tribune-Page-1-GeneralogyBank  
1901-05-19-NJ-Trenton-Evening-Times-Page-1-GeneralogyBank  
1901-05-24-NY-Troy-Times-Page-2-GeneralogyBank  
1901-06-25-NY-Troy-Times-Page-3-GeneralogyBank  
1901-08-17-NY-Watertown-Daily-Times-Page-3-GeneralogyBank  
1901-09-21-NY-Watertown-Daily-Times-Page-12-GeneralogyBank  
1901-09-28-NY-Watertown-Daily-Times-Page-14-GeneralogyBank  
1902-01-11-NY-Normell-Evening-Tribune-Page-1-GeneralogyBank  
1902-02-07-NY-Amsterdam-Daily-Democrat-Page-8-Old-Fulton-NY-Post-Cards  
1903-06-17-NY-Amsterdam-Evening-Recorder-Page-5-Old-Fulton-NY-Post-Cards  
1903-08-15-NY-Utica-Herald-Dispatch-Page-4-Old-Fulton-NY-Post-Cards  
1903-12-19-NY-Amsterdam-Evening-Recorder-Page-7-Old-Fulton-NY-Post-Cards  
1903-12-19-NY-Gloversville-Daily-Leader-page-9-Old-Fulton-NY-Post-Cards  
1903-12-19-NY-New-York-Sun-Page-6-Newspapers-com  
1903-12-20-DC-Washington-Times-Page-14-Newspapers-com  
1903-12-29-NY-Gloversville-Daily-Leader-Page-9-NYHistoricNewspapers-org  
1905-Date-Unclear-NY-Syracuse-Herald-Page-Unknown-Old-Fulton-NY-Post-Cards

### ORGANIZE FILES INTO FOLDERS.

Properly labeled folders can also help you organize your files. For example, you could have a folder called *Genealogy* and, within it, folders for surnames. Then, if you have a lot of files for one specific surname, you could create subfolders for different places, such as *IL Cook* for Cook County, Illinois. You could even add another level for record types, such as newspapers and vital records. I also have a folder for Genealogy Research Plans.

The same can apply to photos. Within my Pictures folder, I put photos from my digital camera in folders arranged by date, while old scanned photos go in surname folders.

### USE GENEALOGY SOFTWARE AND ONLINE FAMILY TREES.

Whether you use genealogy software (like Family Tree Maker <[www.mackiev.com/ftm](http://www.mackiev.com/ftm)> or RootsMagic <[www.rootsmagic.com](http://www.rootsmagic.com)>) or an online family tree on Ancestry.com <[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)>, FamilySearch <[www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)>, Findmypast <[www.findmypast.com](http://www.findmypast.com)> or MyHeritage <[www.myheritage.com](http://www.myheritage.com)>, you can attach scanned records and photos to individuals in your family tree. This gives you another opportunity to organize your digital files.

Using these programs, you can generally label a media item with a:

- **Title/caption:** You can briefly give the name, date and place, like *John Smith and Elizabeth Jones, wedding, 1921, Chicago*.

- **Date:** Standard dates include approximate (*abt 1921*), exact (*20 May 1921*), just a month and year (*May 1921*), or just a year (*1921*). Make sure you select a consistent format for full dates, such as DD MMM YYYY (e.g., *10 Jan 2020*).

- **Place:** Enter a town/township, county, state and country (*Chicago, Cook, Illinois, United States*), or just the county/state or state/country if you can't be more specific. Most genealogy software and online family trees prompt you to enter a standardized place name appropriate for the time period. Those place names usually include the country (e.g., United States or USA), along with the town/township, county and state.

- **Description:** Here you can include more details, such as a specific place. Describe the original photo (e.g., *tintype, carte de visite* or

# Using and Transferring Metadata in Digital Photos

Metadata can help you store and transfer key details about files. But how can you edit metadata, and what happens to it when you move files between programs? To view or edit a photo's metadata, right-click on the file in Windows Explorer, then click on Properties and the Details tab. (In Photos for Mac, right-click an image and select Get Info.) You can search your digital files for words in the metadata, such as a name or a place.

There are two kinds of metadata that are relevant to digital preservation:

- **EXIF** (Exchangeable Image File) data is captured by your camera, phone or scanner. It includes date, location, camera settings and the type and size of the image file.
- **IPTC** (International Press Telecommunications Council) data, such as a caption and descriptive tags (keywords), can be added by users. Adobe <[www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com)>, the maker of Photoshop and Photoshop Elements software, incorporated IPTC into its XMP metadata standard.

We'll focus on IPTC data, which can be extremely useful for savvy archivists. According to Ken Watson, whose website All About Digital Photos <[www.rideau-info.com/photos](http://www.rideau-info.com/photos)> has helpful information on working with digital images, IPTC standards can help future-proof your metadata. That data becomes *part* of the digital photo, contained inside the file and preserved for future software programs.

"[IPTC] is an internationally recognized standard, so your IPTC/XMP data will be viewable by someone 50 or 100 years from now," Watson writes. "The same cannot be said for programs that use some proprietary labelling schemes."

To put it another way: If you use photo software that abides by the IPTC/XMP standard, your labels and descriptive tags (keywords) should be readable by other programs that also follow the standard. For a list of photo software that supports IPTC Photo Metadata, go to <[www.iptc.org/standards/photo-metadata/software-support](http://www.iptc.org/standards/photo-metadata/software-support)>.

This is important to keep in mind if you need to switch programs or a company closes. For example, Google discontinued its popular Picasa photo software in 2014 and replaced it with Google Photos <[www.google.com/photos](http://www.google.com/photos)>, an online application that has similar functionality but doesn't properly support IPTC/XMP.

As such, you might be hesitant to make the switch from Picasa to Google Photos. Fortunately (at time of writing) you can continue to use Picasa as long as it works with future updates of your operating system. And since Picasa generally follows the IPTC/XMP standard, labels and descriptive tags created with the program should be readable by other programs that comply with that standard. Since Google Photos doesn't support the IPTC standard, you'll want to transfer to a different program when the time comes.

Likewise, Microsoft <[www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com)> ended support for its popular photo software, Windows (Live) Photo Gallery, in 2017, and replaced it with the Photos app included in Windows 10. Photo Gallery supports the XMP standard, but the Photos app doesn't. So I'll need to find a different program to support my tags and labels from Photo Gallery once that program stops working with future Windows updates.

Metadata doesn't always stay with a file on online family tree services or social networking sites. FamilySearch and Google Photos are good options because they preserve metadata, but you'll want to be careful as you upload and download images to and from others:

- **FamilySearch:** I uploaded a TIF photo to FamilySearch Memories and linked it to the Family Tree. When I downloaded the file, it was retained the type and size, along with the caption, descriptive tags and face tags.
- **Ancestry.com:** When I did the same at Ancestry.com and downloaded the picture from a Member Tree, the image was converted from TIF to JPG and lost its name data. The file name was also changed, reflecting the title I gave the photo within Ancestry.com.
- **MyHeritage:** Doing the same thing on MyHeritage, my TIF file was converted to JPG, but it kept the caption, descriptive tags and face tags.
- **Facebook:** When I downloaded photos that I had added to Facebook, file names were changed and metadata lost.
- **Google Photos:** Google preserves file name and metadata. Keeping original quality for your photos may require you to exceed your free storage limit.



This is an example of a photo with a visual label.

*cabinet card*) and, optionally, give its dimensions. You could also give the name and address of the person, record office or archive that has the original document or photo, plus the photographer's name and address. If you found the file online, give the website address.

Some websites provide additional options to describe media. On Ancestry.com, you can indicate the media type, such as portrait, document or headstone. On MyHeritage, you can add keywords. FamilySearch now lets you add topic tags to photos and documents, making them easier to search.

Likewise, you can label and tag photos on Facebook <[www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)>, the popular social networking site. Google Photos <[photos.google.com](http://photos.google.com)>, a free photo-sharing and storage service, automatically tags faces (though it misses some of them) and you can add a date, a place and a description.

## The Limits of Face-Tagging

Many photo applications use facial-recognition tools to tag faces automatically (in addition to letting you manually tag faces). Face tags make it easy to search for photos of people, but they are not part of the IPTC standard. Programs use various proprietary systems to tag faces, and so often aren't compatible with each other. So, when labeling digital photos, you should include people's names in the title or caption and the description, not just in face tags.

If you've tagged photos in one program but are switching to another, a tool called Tag That Photo <[www.tagthatphoto.com](http://www.tagthatphoto.com)> can convert your tags and labels. It costs \$49 per year, but you need only a one-year subscription if you convert all your tags at once. If you keep your subscription, you can continue using Tag That Photo's face-recognition technology to tag and index new photos as they're added to your library.



The brothers Jay Luther Crume (1896-1919) and Frank Miles Crume (1894-1983) dressed up for a Wild West photo. Probably taken between about 1909 and 1911 in Moorhead, Minnesota. This photo is in the possession of Rick Crume in 2020.

Some media labels may be lost in a GEDCOM transfer. However, when you use RootsMagic's TreeShare feature or Family Tree Maker's FamilySync technology to synchronize the family file on your computer with an Ancestry Member Tree, media labels are successfully copied between your trees.

### ADD VISUAL LABELS.

Another labeling option is to add text directly on a digital image, creating a visual label that can easily be seen without having to view the file's metadata. (See the next section and the sidebar for tips on working with metadata).

One way to create a visual label is to add a caption in white space below the photo. For instructions on how to manually add labels using various software programs, see Ken Watson's "Visible Captioning of Digital Photos" <[www.rideau-info.com/photos/genealogy-captioning.html](http://www.rideau-info.com/photos/genealogy-captioning.html)>.

Make a copy of your digital photo or document before making alterations (such as adding labels or captions) to it. You want to preserve a version of the original document—particularly if you no longer have access to the physical source.

### USE METADATA TO LABEL DIGITAL PHOTOS.

More tech-savvy genealogists can make use of metadata, information about a file that's embedded within its coding. Though not immediately visible to users, metadata can contain details about a document's origin, contents and

# Sample File-Naming Templates

You can adapt your file names for different types of records, but generally try to keep a consistent system so you can easily find a particular file. In these three templates, I use hyphens within the name, date or place and underscores between those three parts. But you might find it more convenient to use hyphens throughout the file name.

## NAME FIRST

**surname-firstname\_yyyy-mm-dd\_state-place\_event.ext**

*Grant-Alva-A\_1921-08-24\_MN-Clay-County\_Probate.pdf*

Note: You could omit the word *County*.

## PLACE FIRST

**state-county-place\_event\_surname-firstname\_yyyy-mm-dd.ext.**

*ME-Aroostook-County\_Deed-Index\_Pennington\_1808-1879\_FHL-Film-10432.pdf*

Note: Here, *FHL-Film* refers to a Family History Library microfilm.

## DATE FIRST

**yyyy-mm-dd\_surname-firstname\_state-place\_source.ext**

*1903-08-13\_KY-Lexington\_Morning-Herald-Page-1\_GenealogyBank.pdf*

Note: This file is in a folder all pertaining to the same person, so I didn't include the person's name in the file name.

subjects—provided, of course, that another user can decode it.

To improve the chances that someone will be able to interpret your metadata, you'll want to follow certain standard guidelines that make metadata compatible with a wider variety of programs. See the sidebar for more details.

## MANAGE PDFS.

Don't forget to update file names and metadata on your PDFs as well! You can edit a PDF's meta-data in Adobe Acrobat or Adobe Acrobat Reader: File > Properties > Description tab (where you can add a title, author, subject and keywords).

When I link a document (such as a letter, diary or Civil War pension file) to a person in my genealogy software or online family tree, I scan the pages, then combine them into a single PDF. Even though the software or online family tree lets me add a title/caption, date, place and

description, I like to include that information in the PDF file, too. That way, if someone downloads the file, they'll still have all the details about the document. For example, I added pages with a title, introduction and name index to my grandmother Osa Olmsted's diary on FamilySearch <[bit.ly/30qWJP7](http://bit.ly/30qWJP7)>. ●

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**Rick Crume** is gradually digitizing his large collection of family photos and records.

 For more file-naming advice, see Shannon Combs-Bennett's guide <[www.familytreemagazine.com/premium/5-genealogy-filing-systems](http://www.familytreemagazine.com/premium/5-genealogy-filing-systems)>.

# File-Name Template Worksheet

To organize your digital files, you'll need a consistent naming system that can accommodate multiple kinds of photos and documents (as well as various types of files). Review the sidebar earlier in this article for some options, then record your templates (e.g., *LastName-EventName-DateYYYYMMDD.jpg*) in the worksheet below.

Photos	
of Heirlooms	
of People (single)	
of People (multiple)	
of People (group)	
of People	

Records	
for One Person	
for a Couple	
for a Family	

Other Documents	
Charts	
Family Trees	
Published Histories	
Raw DNA	
of People	

**tip**

Consider incorporating source information (e.g., that a record image came from Ancestry.com) into your file-naming system.

# Courthouse Records Checklist

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> adoptions                          | <input type="checkbox"/> justice of the peace records      | <input type="checkbox"/> property foreclosures |
| <input type="checkbox"/> apprenticeships and indentures     | <input type="checkbox"/> land deeds, surveys and plat maps | <input type="checkbox"/> tax rolls             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> bastardy cases                     | <input type="checkbox"/> livestock brands and marks        | <input type="checkbox"/> vital records         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> business and professional licenses | <input type="checkbox"/> mining records                    | <input type="checkbox"/> voter registrations   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> coroner's files and inquests       | <input type="checkbox"/> mortgages and leases              | <input type="checkbox"/> wills and probates    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> court proceedings                  | <input type="checkbox"/> name changes                      | <input type="checkbox"/> wolf-scalp bounties   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> guardianship papers                | <input type="checkbox"/> naturalizations                   |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> homestead files                    | <input type="checkbox"/> orphans records                   |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> insanity and commitment hearings   | <input type="checkbox"/> poorhouse/county farm records     |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> jury lists                         | <input type="checkbox"/> prenuptial agreements             |  |



## Notes

# Tombstone Transcription Form

Name and location of cemetery: \_\_\_\_\_

Location within cemetery: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Lot, row, etc.)

<b>Name</b>			
	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Relatives</b>	
Birth		Spouse(s)	
Death		Other relatives buried nearby	
Marriage(s)			
<b>Notes</b> (artwork, epitaph, condition of tombstone, etc.)			

Photo taken?: Y  N

Notes on photo: \_\_\_\_\_

Take note of the years statewide vital-record-keeping officially began in each US state—that’s when counties started to collect birth, marriage and death information and report it to state offices. Some counties or towns kept stats earlier, and some were slow to comply with state laws, so check with your ancestors’ local government for record availability.

	BIRTH RECORDS	MARRIAGE RECORDS	DEATH RECORDS		BIRTH RECORDS	MARRIAGE RECORDS	DEATH RECORDS
Alabama	1908	1936	1908	Montana	1907	1943	1907
Alaska	1913	1913	1913	Nebraska	1905	1909	1905
Arizona	1909	1909	1909	Nevada	1911	1968	1911
Arkansas	1914	1917	1914	New Hampshire	1901	1901	1901
California	1905	1905	1905	New Jersey	1848	1848	1848
Colorado	1907	1907	1907	New Mexico	1920	1920	1920
Connecticut	1897	1897	1897	New York	1880	1880	1880
Delaware*	1861	1847	1881	North Carolina	1913	1962	1913
District of Columbia	1874	1811	1874	North Dakota	1907	1925	1907
Florida	1899	1927	1899	Ohio	1908	1949	1908
Georgia	1919	1952	1919	Oklahoma	1908	1908	1908
Hawaii	1842	1842	1859	Oregon	1903	1906	1903
Idaho	1911	1947	1911	Pennsylvania	1906	1885	1906
Illinois	1916	1962	1916	Rhode Island	1853	1853	1853
Indiana	1907	1958	1899	South Carolina	1915	1950	1915
Iowa	1880	1880	1880	South Dakota	1905	1905	1905
Kansas	1911	1913	1911	Tennessee*	1908	1945	1908
Kentucky	1911	1958	1911	Texas	1903	1966	1903
Louisiana*	1914	none	1914	Utah	1905	1887	1905
Maine	1892	1892	1892	Vermont	1955	1955	1955
Maryland	1898	1950	1898	Virginia	1912	1912	1912
Massachusetts	1841	1841	1841	Washington	1907	1968	1907
Michigan	1867	1867	1867	West Virginia	1917	1964	1917
Minnesota	1900	1958	1908	Wisconsin	1907	1907	1907
Mississippi	1912	1926	1912	Wyoming	1909	1941	1909
Missouri	1910	1881	1910				

\*Delaware’s statewide birth and death records stop in 1863 and resume in 1881. All Louisiana birth records are kept in parish clerk offices. Tennessee has no statewide birth or death records for 1913.

Washington, DC’s birth records go back to 1874, death records to 1855 (but none were filed during the Civil War) and marriage records to 1811.