

How to Start Tracing Your Family Tree

It doesn't have to be hard to start researching your family history. Just like anything else, begin with what you know—in this case, yourself—and work back in time to your parents, your grandparents, and so on. These 10 tips will get you going.

1. Gather what you already know about your family. Scour your basement, attic and closets (and those of relatives) and collect family records, old photos, letters, diaries, photocopies from family Bibles, and 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.

3. Put it on paper. Write down what you know and fill out a five-generation "pedigree" chart (find one at <www.familytreemagazine.com/freeforms>).

4. Focus your search. Don't try to fill in the blanks in your family tree 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 Web. Try Google searches and websites such as Ancestry.com <ancestry.com> (by subscription) and the FamilySearch Record Search Pilot <pilot.familysearch.org> (free). But don't expect to "find your whole family tree" online.

6. Explore specific Web sites about your ethnic heritage or the parts of the country where your relatives lived. Start with *Family Tree Magazine's* list of 101 Best Websites

<www.familytreemagazine.com/Info/101Best2009> and Cyndi's List <cyndislist.com>.

7. Visit the library. Look for census records on microfilm or in online databases (ask the librarian), as well as resources such as newspapers, city directories, school yearbooks and local history books.

8. Discover your local Family History Center. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has more than 4,000 Family History Centers where you can tap the world's largest collection of genealogical information. You can borrow microfilm of birth, marriage, death, immigration and other records from all over the world. To find the center nearest you, go to <www.familysearch.org/eng/library/FHC/frameset_fhc.asp>.

9. Organize your new information. Enter your findings into 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. Write down stories and photograph heirlooms, too.

10. Visit the state archives website for your ancestral states (link to the site from <www.statearchivists.org/states.htm>). Look for information about genealogy resources to learn what records might exist about your ancestors. Many state archives even post online databases of a variety of genealogical information.

Genealogy Advice and Links

- **AfriGeneas** <afrigenneas.com>
- **Cyndi's List** <www.cyndislist.com>
- **FamilyTreeMagazine.com** <familytreemagazine.com>
- **JewishGen** <jewishgen.org>
- **National Archives and Records Administration: Genealogy** <archives.gov/genealogy>

Genealogy Records and Indexes

- **Ancestry.com** <ancestry.com> (by subscription)
- **Ancestry Library Edition** (free at many libraries; ask at genealogy desk)
- **Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System** <www.itd.nps.gov/cwss> (free)
- **Ellis Island Passenger Search** <ellisland.org> (free)
- **FamilySearch** <familysearch.org> (free)
- **FamilySearch Record Search Pilot** <pilot.familysearch.org> (free)
- **Footnote.com** <footnote.com> (by subscription)
- **Genealogy Bank** <genealogybank.com> (by subscription)
- **HeritageQuest Online** (free at many libraries; ask at genealogy desk)
- **The USGenWeb Project** <usgenweb.org>

Genealogy How-to Books

- *The Everything Guide to Online Genealogy* by Kimberly Powell (Adams Media)
- *Family Tree Legacies: Preserving Memories Throughout Time* by Allison Stacy and Diane Haddad (Family Tree Books)
- *How to Do Everything Genealogy* by George G. Morgan (McGraw Hill)
- *The Family Tree Resource Book for Genealogists* edited by Sharon DeBartolo Carmack and Erin Nevius (Family Tree Books)
- *Unpuzzling Your Past* by Emily Anne Croom (Family Tree Books)
- *Who Do You Think You Are? The Essential Guide to Tracing Your Family History* by Megan Smolenyak Smolenyak (Viking)

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