

## Introduction to Genealogy and Family History

Genealogy and family history research is a fascinating and rewarding journey that can lead to uncovering family secrets, discovering relatives, learning family stories and building a comprehensive family tree. This endeavor can take the form of a pastime, a hobby, a passion, or a legacy and it can be quite rewarding.

There are many reasons why people begin researching their family history. A person may want to join a lineage society, such as the Sons or Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) or find the town in the old country where the family originated. Others seek to learn about their origins and discover more about who they are and where they came from, or they may want to have a reunion of all the descendants of a pioneer settler.

Regardless of the reasons, each person seeking to learn about their family history is embarking on a *quest*. Just like the journeys of their pioneer ancestors, such quests may seem almost impossible or never-ending. However, a quest is just an “over-all” goal and like every other journey, proceeds one step at a time.

Genealogists employ research methods similar to those of a detective, as they systematically seek to uncover the histories of their ancestors. By collecting clues, analyzing evidence, and making informed conclusions, they navigate both the complexities and rewards inherent in family history research. This work requires extensive expertise in interpreting historical records and meticulous attention to detail. Commonly used sources include vital records (birth, marriage and death) and census records, photographs, and personal documents to reconstruct family histories. Each new discovery contributes valuable context and depth to the ongoing narrative of an individual's lineage.

### Start With What You Know

Identify what you know and move backward in time. Start with the most recent members of your family (you, your parents and grandparents, etc.), then carefully document each generation as you work backward in time, one ancestor at a time. You must climb your family tree from the bottom up, sturdy limb by sturdy limb. This will keep you from making rash jumps in your family history or making false assumptions about your family's lineage.

Start out by recording basic information about your ancestors on a Five-Generations Worksheet ([Five-Generation-Ancestor-Chart.pdf](#)) and then record all the descendants from each of those identified names using [AncestryFamilyGroupRecord](#) for each couple.

Look around your home for documents that will help you fill in the blanks. You may be sitting on a treasure trove of family history, such as:

- Certificates - Birth, Marriage, and Death

- Bibles, frequently used to record births, marriages and deaths in the family
- Letters
- Photos
- Diaries, Journals
- Obituaries, newspaper articles
- Anything else that might contain family information

Once you've gathered your initial information, reach out to as many living relatives as possible. Try to collect copies of important documents and photographs and ask them to share their memories and family stories. Be sure to document and take photos of treasured family heirlooms as well. Remember, people won't always be around to share their stories, memories can fade, and family records or pictures can easily be lost or given away—so it's important to capture this information while you have the chance. These living relatives may have information that you will not be able to find anywhere else. Conduct the interview. Make sure to include when and where the interview took place, and the name of interviewer and interviewee. You'll need to validate family lore, but information passed down from generation to generation can give your research some direction.

**Interview:** It's ideal to arrange an interview with your relative in advance so as not to catch them off guard. And if they will let you record the interview, what a treasure to have their responses in their own voice to preserve for generations to come. If you can't conduct the interview in person, you can request to interview someone over the phone or through email. To make the most out of an interview with an older relative, it's best to come prepared. Assist them in completing a Five Generation Chart, beginning with themselves to the best of their recollection, as well as a Family Group Sheet that includes their siblings.

### **Here are a few tips to prepare for your family history interview:**

- It can be beneficial to provide your relative with a list of your questions in advance of your actual interview, so they have time to recall detail and think about their response.
- Bring along a notebook and writing utensils, plus a printout of your interview questions, so you're ready to ask questions and document responses quickly and accurately.
- Download a recording app on your phone, or bring a tape recorder, in case your family member is open to the interview being recorded. Another option is to video record your interview.
- Be sure to bring any old family photos or mementos that you want to learn more about. Your relative may be able to answer those questions, and an old photo may help bring back valuable memories they're willing to share with you. Ask if they have photos to share with you.
- Don't be shy! It can be a bit scary to approach a grandparent or older relative and ask to interview them about their life. Don't be discouraged, though, because

most likely your relative will more than understand your desire to document the family's history and be happy to oblige. No matter how nervous you are, just do it – because you never know what the circumstances will be in six months or a year. Now may be your only chance.

- **Most importantly, respect your relative's feelings and boundaries.** If they don't feel comfortable answering a certain question, or are not okay with the interview being recorded, make sure they know that you honor those guidelines and appreciate their help documenting the story of your family.

Attached are questions that can be used for conducting an interview. Use this list as a guide to tailor your interview for the individual you are interviewing and relevance to your family. Pick and choose from the list and compile your own sequence of questions and add other questions that you think would be relevant. In most cases, all of the questions will be far too many and will overwhelm your interviewee. Instead, prioritize the questions you really want to know and then ask more if the opportunity arises or ask for a follow-up interview. Remember, an interview of this kind is a very personal experience and can be emotional for the person being interviewed. Try to avoid questions that may be upsetting or irrelevant.

**Before you decide what to do with all the information you've gathered you need to be aware of the Genealogical Proof Standard.**

**The Genealogical Proof Standard** outlines the minimum steps genealogists must take to ensure credible work. It applies to both professionals and hobbyists, promoting accurate and reliable family trees and avoiding unsupported assumptions. There are five essential steps for accurate research:

- Reasonably exhaustive research has been completed.
- Each statement of fact has a complete and accurate source citation.
- The evidence is reliable and has been skillfully correlated and interpreted.
- Contradictory evidence has been resolved.
- The conclusion has been soundly reasoned and coherently written.

### **Why the Genealogical Proof Standard Is Important**

Researching family history can get complicated, with numerous records, websites, and books each offering a piece of the puzzle. Using the Genealogical Proof Standard helps validate your research and supports your findings.

The Genealogical Proof Standard is a process designed to clarify what we know and what we need to learn, facilitate explanation of work to others, provide a framework for addressing complex research questions using indirect evidence, and support the formulation of sound conclusions.

Applying the Genealogical Proof Standard at the outset of research can streamline future reviews of prior work and help address any uncertainties about earlier genealogical findings. It also provides a framework for assessing new information that might impact existing research.

For many beginning genealogists, the Genealogical Proof Standard may appear overwhelming, but once understood, it should boost confidence and guide future research.

### **What is a Reasonably Exhaustive Search**

"Reasonably exhaustive" research is a challenging stage of the Genealogical Proof Standard. It means doing enough work to be thorough, though there's no set number of documents you must consult.

Researchers may consult a range of records, including birth certificates, marriage certificates, death certificates, obituaries, probate records, and census reports, to gather information about an ancestor. Using a checklist (attached) to track which sources have been reviewed can assist in organizing the research process. It should be noted that any given record may address only certain questions, and some documents might not be available in all cases.

Most genealogists agree that thorough research can't be completed solely online. While tools like FamilySearch, MyHeritage, FindMyPast, and Ancestry are helpful starting points, many records remain inaccessible or undigitized. If you can't find a record online, you may need to contact local archives or visit in person. Genealogical research is often an ongoing process.

### **Check Your Facts and Cite Your Sources**

When conducting thorough genealogical research, document your sources accurately to ensure your work is reliable and credible. Proper documentation enables others to verify your findings and helps resolve discrepancies when new or conflicting information emerges. Citing your sources means recording where your data comes from, and it's best to cite and organize sources—digital or hardcopy—as you find them.

Unless you intend to publish your family history, a formal citation with a specific format is not required; however, you should include all necessary details to identify and locate the original record.

- The name of the author or creator
- The title of the publication or record set
- The page number, volume, catalog and/or identification number
- The date you accessed the source, particularly important for online sources
- The publication or creation date
- The repository of the source

Although it may seem overwhelming, genealogy software like Family Tree Maker, Legacy Family Tree, and RootsMagic help you organize your sources by linking them to people and events, generating citation reports, and tracking your research. Research sites such as Ancestry and FamilySearch also connect sources to individuals as you verify matches. Nevertheless, manual citation remains necessary for hardcopy materials

or digital sources not found within databases, using the six points referenced above. Accurate source citation is essential for evaluating evidence, ensuring retrievability of original material, and enabling others to replicate your research.

## Analyze and Correctly Interpret the Evidence

At this stage, you have plenty of evidence of facts about your ancestors. How you review and analyze it will shape your understanding of your relative. Learning to analyze sources is a skill that comes with practice and experience, but it's worth the effort. To draw accurate conclusions from the evidence you have gathered be sure to evaluate your sources carefully:

- **Original sources** tend to be more accurate than derivative records. They were written close in time to the events they record. These sources are more likely to be correct and are typically the preferred type of sources for genealogical research. However, on occasion the recorder may have made a mistake. Infrequently an original record is deliberately falsified, such as "back-dating" a marriage to account for the early birth of the first child. Even a source recorded close to the time of the event may have unintentional errors.
- **Derivative sources** are not original sources but are evidence that has been compiled from other various sources or that is written after an event occurred. Examples include biographies and family histories. They tend to be easier to use and contain more information. However, they represent a reiteration of information from one or more other sources. The author may not have had enough information to adequately interpret the other sources. On the other hand, the compiler may have known of errors in the other sources and corrected or explained them in the compilation.
- **Primary information** is documented at or near the time of an event by individuals with firsthand knowledge, which generally increases their reliability. This type of evidence is usually found in original documents. However, not all details within an original record are necessarily "primary." For instance, while a death certificate often provides primary information regarding the death, it may present secondary information about the individual's birth. Information not sourced from a direct account should be approached with caution. If the origin of the information cannot be determined, it remains undocumented and thus is considered less reliable.
- **Secondary Information** is recorded after an event or by someone not directly involved, making it generally less reliable than original sources. For example, birth dates on death certificates or ages reported by census takers are secondary information, as they rely on informants who may not know all details. Most derivative and published records, such as family histories or biographies, contain secondary information, but not all printed material is secondary—city directories and newspapers can be exceptions. While primary sources are preferred for accuracy, secondary sources can still provide useful context and research leads.

## Resolve Any Contradictory Evidence

The Genealogical Proof Standard involves synthesizing diverse pieces of information and evidence to form a well-supported conclusion that can stand independently.

Of all the steps in the Genealogical Proof Standard, this step can be one of the easiest to overlook. You will all find mismatching evidence at some point in your research. When this happens, it can be convenient to simply discount the bits of information that don't seem to align with your gut feeling—but that wouldn't be in line with the Genealogical Proof Standard.

Effective researchers carefully consider and address conflicting evidence. They analyze and provide reasoned explanations for divergent findings. The evaluation of evidence is a continual process, commencing with the initial review of a document's relevance to genealogical inquiry. As details are documented and citations are created, researchers evaluate the reliability of each source and compare its information to pre-existing data from prior research to establish corroboration or identify inconsistencies.

Gathering evidence is just the start; interpreting it can be the real challenge. The following will help you make sense of it all.

**Ask Questions** as you come across conflicting data in your research that you are unsure how to handle, take a step back and consider

- When and where was the record created?
- What information is missing or incomplete from the record?
- How was the information recorded?
- Who created the record?
- How reliable is the information in the record?

By asking these questions, you will begin to piece bits of information together while discovering what other research still needs to be done.

Sometimes you just need to **look at the evidence from a different perspective**. Try viewing it in various formats—such as tables, charts, lists, timelines, maps, diagrams, or sticky notes. Use these tools to uncover hidden patterns by exploring different combinations and perspectives.

**Develop your research skills.** The more time you spend doing research the easier it will be to resolve conflicts and be confident in your conclusions. As your expertise in genealogical research advances, your capacity to address complex genealogical questions is enhanced. Continued research and effective utilization of discovered records contribute significantly to the development of your skills. The following are ways you can help develop your skills:

- Major platform sites like Ancestry and FamilySearch offer comprehensive help and educational sections. These resources include instructions for using site features and cover a range of genealogical topics to support users in utilizing sources and developing their skills in genealogy.

- FamilySearch's Research Wiki is a free online resource with articles about genealogy for countries worldwide, including links to databases, research strategies, and guides. It provides explanations of various record types, their contents, and how to access them.
- Several professional genealogist host YouTube videos with practical tutorials that will help you develop your skills. Topics include explanations of various record types, their contents, and how to access them, best practices when creating and managing your family tree, tips, strategies and resources, research hacks, products, and technology. Some even host live Q&A sessions.
- Local societies can be very helpful if they hold regular meetings and provide educational opportunities. Another less tangible benefit of society membership is the camaraderie experienced with like-minded family historians. They can also give you guidance on local records and are knowledgeable about local history.

A link to resources can be found on the Cheboygan County Genealogical Society website <http://cheboygangenealogy.com/>

## The Next Step

Now that you've gathered the information you already have available and you've learned about the Genealogical Proof Standard, what's next? The next crucial step is to consider how you will record and preserve the information you have gathered and how to continue your research using genealogical and historical records. This next section will look at online research platforms and solutions for storing your research.

## Online Research Platforms

Every family history platform is a little different. So, finding the right one means making sure its features meet your personal needs and ancestral origins. Most genealogical platforms will give you access to some sort of database, but they may differ in size and scope. Having access to a large database of historical records is the best way to ensure successful genealogical research. It's also important to make sure that the platform you choose can serve your ancestors' geographic location.

Most genealogy platforms that provide record searching and family tree building are subscription based. The following are brief descriptions of the three leading subscription sites, plus FamilySearch, which is free.

**Ancestry** is the largest subscription genealogy company in the world. Ancestry boasts more than 65 billion records from 80-plus countries, plus 140 million user-submitted family trees. Free users can build a family tree and search the record collection of which a small subset will be viewable. To fully utilize the sites abilities a subscription is required.

**My Heritage** is a newer subscription genealogy company with over 35 billion historical records. This site has some non-US records sets not available on Ancestry.

**Find My Past** is the go-to source for the British Isles, also claiming billions of records. This site continues to expand its North American footprint, however most of these records are also available on Ancestry and My Heritage.

**FamilySearch** is made available by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and free to everyone. It offers online access to records from more than 170 countries and principalities—more than 20.5 billion records in all.

When choosing a platform, consider not only the record collections and subscription cost, but also the features that will help you organize, annotate, and share your research with relatives. Some platforms allow you to upload photographs, add stories, and even collaborate with other family members in real time. Whichever you select, make sure you download copies of important documents and back up your work in multiple locations such as an external hard drive or cloud storage. Preserving your findings digitally ensures their safety for future generations. You can also consider creating physical archives—scrapbooks, printed trees, or family history binders—for those who cherish tangible keepsakes.

Some people use multiple platforms to utilize the best features of each; some only use FamilySearch to avoid the subscription costs of other platforms. Some people don't like the one tree format of FamilySearch and use an offline program to build and maintain their family tree and only use FamilySearch to do research and find records.

Before deciding it is recommended that you do a more thorough review of each platform by visiting their websites, researching through Google or viewing any of the many informational videos available on YouTube.

### **Offline Genealogical Software Programs**

The following are five of the top offline programs. Most of these access hints from subscription sites with an active subscription. Keep in mind that if records are linked to your tree through such a site, cancelling your subscription will mean you can no longer view the source, though the reference to the source itself and the associated facts will remain in your tree.

- **Family Tree Maker** is one of the pricier offline programs, however, it can synchronize with Ancestry and receive hints from Ancestry and FamilySearch. If you cancel your Ancestry subscription you can still view, edit, and manage your tree's information, including adding people and photos. However, you will not be able to access records linked to your tree or receive hints that require a paid subscription.
- **Legacy Family Tree** has a robust free version, and its interface is a lot like Microsoft Office, so it is easier for users familiar with Windows. It can also interface with FindMyPast, FamilySearch, GenealogyBank and MyHeritage to find hints.

- **Family Historian** is a UK based software that offers a 30-day free trial. It is highly rated every year. It is only Windows based. It does interface with Find My Past, My Heritage and Family Search.
- **My Heritage Family Tree Builder** is free and synchronizes with My Heritage. If you cancel your My Heritage subscription you won't be able to add people or photos to your tree and access to many documents will be locked. It also interfaces with Family Search.
- **Roots Magic** offers a free "Essentials" version that users can access indefinitely, or they may opt for the full version, typically priced at \$39, with discounts occasionally available as high as 50% off. This program enables downloading of Ancestry family trees and synchronization between the software and Ancestry. Additionally, it provides integration with Family Search.

It is recommended to comprehensively evaluate these offline programs to identify which features best align with your needs. Consider important aspects such as reporting functionality, charting options, document and photo management, compatibility with subscription-based platforms, long-term usability after subscriptions expire, and potential future requirements for DNA analysis capabilities.

## Continuing Your Research

As mentioned earlier, the online research platforms give the ability to do much of your research can be done online and at home, but not all. And for those who don't feel comfortable doing research online there are still some limited manual avenues and in fact there are some record sets that can only be researched manually, but some of those may require travel or research assistance from personnel at local repositories.

Whichever online platform you use, you'll need to create an account and begin building your family tree. Each site will ask for details about you, your parents, and grandparents, which you should have from your five generations worksheet and family group sheets. After entering the basic details, most platforms begin generating hints that may link to relevant records for your relatives. Additional records can also be found through manual searches beyond those suggested by hints.

## Some Do's and Don'ts When Recording Facts

- Keep track of all surname spelling variations.
- Do not abbreviate names, dates and places.
- Enter the **full name**: first, middle, and last.
- Organized by **last name**, first, middle.
- For women, supply the full maiden name, not a married name.
- Write dates in this format: Day-Month-Year (25 Feb 1878)
- Enter **full place names**: City, County, State (e.g., Mineola, Nassau, New York).

## **Seek original records.**

Viewing original records can also generate new research leads. Indexes, whether physical or digital, are often incomplete and may have errors and usually only contain a subset of the information available in the original document. Always review images of original documents online. If originals aren't available online you may be able to request a copy of the original from the repository where it is held, usually for a nominal fee.

## **Look beyond the referenced page**

Checking surrounding pages in census records might uncover relatives or neighbors. Also, some online records have multiple pages so always get in the habit of looking at the pages after the image that opens. If the record set is a book or directory, you may also find valuable information elsewhere in the book, such as general information in the beginning or indexes at the end of the record set.

## **Not all Records are Created Equal**

This was referred to in the analysis and evaluation step of the Genealogical Proof Standard.

Genealogical records can vary significantly in quality and reliability. Original records are generally considered the most trustworthy and accurate. 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. In general, records created by people closer to an event (both in time and in relationship) are more reliable than those that weren't. Considering all this, any record can have an errors either due to mistakes made at the time of creation, manual copying, transliteration or transcription.

U.S. states began civil registration of birth, marriage, and death at different times, without standardized information being collected. By the early 1900s most states were recording vital events. Today privacy laws for these records differ by state so what you are able to access varies from state to state.

## **Genealogy Record Types**

**Birth records** are established at the time of an individual's birth and typically detail the date and location of birth, along with the names of the parents. These records may also include additional information regarding the parents, such as father's occupation and the mother's maiden name. Birth registrations are usually maintained by local government authorities. Baptism records from churches and religious organizations are sometimes used as alternatives to civil vital records, especially for periods before civil registration was standardized. Birth announcements can sometimes be found in local newspapers.

**Marriage Records** document a couple's marriage date and names, often including ages, name of parents, and witnesses. These records are maintained by local government authorities. Marriage records from churches and religious organizations are sometimes used as alternatives to civil vital records, especially for periods before

standardized civil registration. Marriage and engagement announcements also appear in newspapers.

**Divorce records** document the end of a marriage and are sporadically available. They will typically provide the date of marriage and divorce and identify minor children with ages at the time of divorce.

**Death Records** are created when an individual dies and typically list the date, location, cause of death, birth details, parental information, last residence, and informant's name. While local governments usually record these, church records may also serve as sources for earlier periods. Because the information is provided by someone other than the deceased, some information found may not be accurate. Local newspapers may offer additional details through death notices and obituaries.

**Cemetery Records** may include images or transcriptions of tombstones or other burial records kept by the cemetery. Cemetery records typically list a person's name and birth and death dates. Family members were often buried near each other, so one discovery may lead you to others. Some people buried in a cemetery may not have a burial marker, particularly if they died before the mid to late 1800s. Even though these are secondary sources they provide hints for facts to be verified with primary sources.

### **Census Records**

- Federal census records have been collected every decade in the United States since 1790.
- Between 1790 and 1840, census records listed only the head of household by name, with tally marks used to indicate the sex and age ranges of other household members.
- From 1850 through 1950, all individuals in a household were enumerated by full name, age, place of birth, and additional details. The 1890 census was largely destroyed by fire. Census records post-1950 are not yet available to the public. Census records become public 72 years after collection.
- Several states conducted their own censuses in alternate years; these records vary by jurisdiction.
- While census records may contain inaccuracies, they remain an important resource for tracing ancestors and identifying family relationships. Since the information collected on each census varies, it is advisable to locate individuals in every available census to develop a comprehensive understanding of their lives.

### **Newspapers and Obituaries**

- Local newspapers recorded a variety of stories and events about people. Marriages and births being the major events recorded.

- Obituaries or death notices were often recorded a few days after a person's death and may include information such as death date, age at death, birth information, names of parents, names of living relatives and those predeceased and a variety of other life information. Detailed obituaries were not common before the 1880s and deaths may not have been recorded in newspapers at all previous to the mid to late 1800s.
- Sometimes there wasn't a local newspaper printed in a particular town but people in that town may have been mentioned in a newspaper in a town or larger city nearby.

**Church Records**, as mentioned above, may contain details such as births, marriages, deaths, burials, christenings, and membership lists. Finding these records in the United States is often difficult due to incomplete documentation, lost records, or scattered locations. Common denominations with recorded events include Catholics, Lutherans, Congregationalists, Reformed churches, and Presbyterians.

**Probate Records** are court documents used to manage a person's land or assets after death. They may include wills, estate inventories, letters of administration, and guardianship papers, often listing relatives and financial details. As some of the earliest records in new areas, they offer useful information when other sources are unavailable.

**Land Records** include land deeds, land grants, plat maps, or other records related to land.

- Deeds record property transfers, noting land descriptions, parties' names, transaction amounts, and witnesses. They can also provide details about residence, family relationships and close neighbors. They can imply dates of marriage or death.
- Land maps and plat maps can help to establish where the land was that a person owned and who their neighbors were.
- Land records were usually among the first records kept in a newly settled area and can provide valuable information.

**City Directories** list names and addresses of residents in a town or city for a specific year, usually reflecting information from the year before. These directories help determine an ancestor's location, occupation, home address, spouse, and neighbors, and could suggest the year of death for men if their spouse is identified as widowed.

**Military Records** pertain to the military in some way. There are a variety of military records that were created because of the involvement of the United States in the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Civil War, World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War, etc. Military records in some cases can give birth information, residences, names of family members, details of military service, etc.

**Immigration Records** pertain to people moving from one country to another and can include ship passenger lists, naturalization documents, immigration/emigration information, etc.

- Passenger lists often give names and ages of individuals and sometimes their place of origin. If people traveled with family members they were usually listed together on the passenger lists.
- Naturalization documents can list a person's name, age, witnesses, and place of origin. In some cases, women were not required to naturalize separately from their husbands. Before 1906 in the United States, naturalization documents sometimes only listed a home country rather than a specific town or city where a person came from. Since 1906, more detailed information has been included in naturalization documents.

**School Records** are created by schools, colleges, and universities. They may include lists of students, yearbooks, school censuses, school histories, or other records. Yearbooks may contain photographs of individuals attending the school and information about the school activities they were involved in.

**Tax Records** can include tax lists, enumeration lists, and other taxation information recorded by the local or national government. They may help to establish a person's residence, help to distinguish people of the same name in the same place, indicate the financial status of a family, or give indirect evidence of death and family members. Tax records were usually among the first records kept in a newly settled area and can provide valuable information when other records are not available.

**Court Records** are produced by the court system, but each state governs them differently, affecting what records exist and where they're stored. These records can reveal personal details and help identify family, neighbors, or friends.

**Miscellaneous Records** include records that can be helpful for genealogy research that don't fit in the above categories such as Bible records, periodical indexes, town records, lists of settlers, store ledgers, account books, lists of people in a certain occupation and place, passport applications, occupational records, government records, historical documents, and various other historical and genealogical records.

**Family Histories and Genealogies** are published works containing genealogical data, such as biographies, family trees and books about pioneers families of a particular area, but as derivative sources, their details should be verified against primary records. Member-submitted family trees in online databases those you inherit may lack citations and may be unreliable, so it's essential to assess the authenticity of any genealogical information through your own research before relying on it. The same is true of oral histories and family lore. It is important to document these, but also research to assess the validity of these stories.

**Study social history:** County or town histories and local records offer valuable insights into your ancestors.

Your ancestor's dates only tell part of their story. Learn about their community, challenges, and the forces that shaped their choices. Historical context can provide valuable insights into their lives and help you connect with past generations.

City directories and Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps reveal your ancestor's neighborhood layout, while local histories and scholarly works offer context. Newspapers provide details about daily community life.

**Maps** can help you learn about your ancestor's location and provide context for finding records. Understanding historical borders is important, since changes can affect where records are kept or under which placename. For example, shifting county boundaries might mean an ancestor lived in different counties while staying in one place. Reviewing historical maps helps identify the correct county for record searches at any given time.

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

Much attention is given to census records as well as birth, marriage, and death certificates. However, it is important to recognize that ancestors may also be documented in many other, less commonly referenced records.

Be open-minded in your research; court and land records, though often complex, can offer valuable details about your ancestor and lead you to other family members. Less common sources like society minutes, school records, or newspaper columns may also contain useful information.

### **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 and birthplace.

### **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).

- **Cluster research** examines the “clusters” of individuals who lived in your ancestor’s community. This strategy places special emphasis on friends, peers, neighbors, coworkers and other community members who were part of your ancestor’s everyday life.
- **Collateral research** investigates your non-direct-line ancestors. Though you may not share much DNA with your great-great-grand-uncle, records of him can lead you to records of your ancestor. Your ancestors’ in-laws, stepsiblings, stepchildren, other spouses and any adopted family members might also be considered collateral relatives.

Of course, you’ll find overlap between the subjects of these research strategies. Your ancestor’s siblings, cousins, aunts and uncles likely lived, worked and emigrated near your ancestor. They were your ancestor’s “collateral” relatives, but also members of his cluster.

This type of research is also referred to as the FAN (friends, associates and neighbors) club.

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

In addition to index errors as mentioned earlier, other less apparent mistakes can affect the accuracy of your family tree. While conducting research, it is important to verify that the data aligns logically. For example, confirm that parents were born before their children, that they were of an age where having children would be feasible, and that the ages of siblings are consistent with reasonable birth intervals. It is also necessary to check whether mothers were alive at the time of their children's births, as discrepancies may indicate incorrect death dates or the presence of another mother. Any inconsistencies in data should be noted for further review.

### **Record and Document Your Information**

Develop a consistent filing system. As you accumulate files, records and other data, 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.

File the information in an organized way so that you can locate each individual in your ever-expanding collection. The best way might be to create a folder for each surname and then by individual (either on your computer or in your file cabinet) include old photos of them, their families, homes, and cemetery markers, plus their important documents, letters, and memorabilia. Add their stories—both those you heard as a child and those family members tell you. As mentioned earlier even if you are doing your research online you will still want to download copies of records to either print, digitally store or both.

### **Back it up.**

It is advisable to allocate regular time for backing up your genealogy data and ensure these backups exist in multiple locations. For instance, maintain copies of your files on your desktop, an external hard drive, in paper format, and within a reputable cloud

storage service such as Dropbox. Individuals who prefer paper records should also consider storing duplicate copies at a separate location or digitizing all documents. In any case, it is essential that backups are kept offsite to mitigate loss resulting from fire or natural disasters.

### **Keep learning and embrace technology**

We have only touched on the most important and fundamental elements that you need to know about genealogy and researching your family history. To truly excel as a family historian, you must nurture your curiosity and remain adaptable in your approach. Genealogy is not a static pursuit; new information, record collections, and technological advances are constantly emerging. By keeping an investigative mindset, you'll be poised to capitalize on fresh leads or resources as they appear, and you'll deepen your understanding of both your ancestors' world and the evolving tools at your disposal.

Engage with others in the genealogy community—whether online or through local societies—to exchange ideas, seek advice, and celebrate discoveries. Discussion with fellow researchers often brings new perspectives or suggestions for stubborn brick walls, and you may even find distant cousins who share pieces of your family puzzle. Collaboration amplifies your efforts and keeps the journey lively and rewarding.

Genealogy is an ongoing process of exploration, analysis, and discovery. Each new piece of evidence allows for a review of previous assumptions and may lead to updated perspectives on a family's history. Consider consulting books that focus on your ancestors' specific locations and historical periods. Numerous libraries, genealogical societies, conferences, companies, and professional genealogists offer valuable resources. You may want enroll in self-paced online genealogy courses, access live or on-demand webinars led by experts in the field.

The evolution of genealogy has been profoundly shaped by technological innovations, particularly those arising from the advent of the internet. Online research platforms such as Ancestry and FamilySearch have transformed traditional research methodologies, introducing new efficiencies while also challenging traditional practices.

Maintaining openness to emerging tools and resources for researching and sharing ancestral information is important. Developments in genealogy technology have significantly streamlined research efforts and facilitated the preservation and dissemination of findings. However, new genealogists should also recognize the value of numerous non-digital and offline sources, which remain essential components of comprehensive genealogical research.

**Author's Note:** *I want to be transparent that this paper was created in part with the help of an artificial intelligence (AI) – Microsoft Co-Pilot. The AI assisted in generating an early draft of the article, but every paragraph was subsequently reviewed, edited, and refined by the author. The final content is the result of extensive human curation and*

*creativity. I am proud to present this work and assure readers that while AI was a tool in the process, the story, style, and substance have been carefully shaped by the author.*

*The forms accompanying this document are readily accessible to the public through the creators' websites. These forms have been included as attachments for the convenience of individuals using this paper.*

*A Schmitt*

# Five-Generation Ancestor Chart

see chart #

Chart # \_\_\_\_  
1 on this chart = \_\_\_\_ on chart # \_\_\_\_

|                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                 |                                                                              |                                                                                                                 |                                                                              |                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                  |
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familytree  
MAGAZINE

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# Family Group Record



Prepared By \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship to Preparer \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Ancestral Chart # \_\_\_\_\_ Family Unit # \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

## Husband

| Date—Day, Month, Year |  | Occupation(s) |  | City        |  | County |  | State or Country |  | Religion |                          |
|-----------------------|--|---------------|--|-------------|--|--------|--|------------------|--|----------|--------------------------|
| Born                  |  |               |  |             |  |        |  |                  |  |          |                          |
| Christened            |  |               |  |             |  |        |  |                  |  |          | Name of Church           |
| Married               |  |               |  |             |  |        |  |                  |  |          | Name of Church           |
| Died                  |  |               |  |             |  |        |  |                  |  |          | Cause of Death           |
| Buried                |  |               |  |             |  |        |  |                  |  |          | Date Will Written/Proved |
| Father                |  | Cem/Place     |  | Other Wives |  |        |  |                  |  |          |                          |
| Mother                |  |               |  |             |  |        |  |                  |  |          |                          |

## Wife maiden name

| Occupation(s) |                | Religion |                          |
|---------------|----------------|----------|--------------------------|
| Born          |                |          |                          |
| Christened    |                |          | Name of Church           |
| Died          |                |          | Cause of Death           |
| Buried        |                |          | Date Will Written/Proved |
| Father        | Cem/Place      |          |                          |
| Mother        | Other Husbands |          |                          |

| • Sex | Children Given Names | Birth |            | Birthplace |        | Date of first marriage/Place |                | Date of Death/Cause |                      | Computer I.D. # |
|-------|----------------------|-------|------------|------------|--------|------------------------------|----------------|---------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
|       |                      | Day   | Month Year | City       | County | St./Ctry.                    | Name of Spouse | City                | County State/Country |                 |
|       | 1                    |       |            |            |        |                              |                |                     |                      |                 |
|       | 2                    |       |            |            |        |                              |                |                     |                      |                 |
|       | 3                    |       |            |            |        |                              |                |                     |                      |                 |
|       | 4                    |       |            |            |        |                              |                |                     |                      |                 |
|       | 5                    |       |            |            |        |                              |                |                     |                      |                 |
|       | 6                    |       |            |            |        |                              |                |                     |                      |                 |
|       | 7                    |       |            |            |        |                              |                |                     |                      |                 |
|       | 8                    |       |            |            |        |                              |                |                     |                      |                 |
|       | 9                    |       |            |            |        |                              |                |                     |                      |                 |
|       | 10                   |       |            |            |        |                              |                |                     |                      |                 |
|       | 11                   |       |            |            |        |                              |                |                     |                      |                 |
|       | 12                   |       |            |            |        |                              |                |                     |                      |                 |

# Family History Questionnaire

*Start by filling out a Five Generation Chart. You/Your refers to the subject of the questions.*

## Your Family

1. Your full name at birth, date and place. Any stories that you have been told about your birth.
2. Did your birth take place in a hospital, at home? Was there a doctor or midwife present?
3. Were you named after anyone?
4. What were you called when you were a child? Did you have any nicknames?
5. Your father's name, birth date and place.
6. Your mother's name at birth, date and place.
7. What do you remember about your parents growing up?
8. Did you learn any important life lessons from them?
9. Your brothers' and sisters' names, dates and places of birth, dates and places of marriage, spouses' names and children. *This can be done on Family Group Sheets.*

## Childhood: The Family Home

1. What is your first childhood memory?
2. Can you describe what your daily life was like as a child?
3. Did you live in the city or country? Did you live on a farm?
4. What type of house did you live in as a child? Describe.
5. What other buildings were on the same property?
6. As a child, did you have a room of your own, or did you share it with someone else? If so, whom?
7. Did you have a bed of your own?
8. In what room did you eat? Kitchen? Dining room?
9. Where did you eat when there was company?
10. Did your house have a parlor? Was the family allowed to use it?
11. How was your home heated? Was it warm in winter? Explain.
12. Did you have a fireplace?
13. Did you burn wood? Coal?
14. Did you have to buy fuel or was there a choice, such as cutting wood, with which you had to help?
15. What kind of kitchen stove did your parents cook on?
16. Where did your family get water? Was it plentiful? What methods were used to conserve water?

17. Did your family always have a refrigerator? If not, what did you use instead? When did you get a refrigerator?
18. Did your family have a cellar? Where did you store apples, potatoes? Canned foods?
19. Did you always have indoor plumbing? If not, when did you get it? What did you do before indoor plumbing?
20. Did you always have electricity? If not, when did you get it?
21. Did you ever use candles or kerosene lamps? Whose job was it to fill the lamps and replace the wicks?
22. When and where did you move during your childhood? What do you remember about each house and the family circumstances and reason for the move?

## Family Relations: Responsibilities and Conditions

1. What was your position in the family? Oldest? Youngest? Were there any advantages? Disadvantages?
2. What were your duties as a small child? Describe your responsibilities as you grew older.
3. Did you care for your younger siblings? Did you like it? Was it difficult?
4. Who cooked the meals? Who did the ironing?
5. Did you buy or make your own clothing? Who was the family seamstress? Who repaired the family shoes?
6. Did your parents keep in touch with distant family?
7. Did you visit relatives often? Near? Far?
8. How did you get your mail? How often?
9. Did you have any childhood diseases?
10. What do you remember about family pets?
11. Were you especially close to anyone in the family?
12. Are there any special family heirlooms that were handed down to you?

## Family Income and Livelihood

1. What did your father do for a living?
2. What did your mother do for a living?
3. Did you contribute to the family income?
4. Did you get any allowance as a child? Or did you have to earn your own spending money? If so, how?
5. When did you get your first job outside of the family?
6. Where did your food come from? A grocery store, a nearby farm, your family's farm/ garden?
7. Did your family have a garden? For family use or profit?
8. Who did the planting? Digging? Cultivating? Weeding? Watering?
9. What kind of vegetables did you grow? Who harvested them?
10. Did your family have fruit trees?
11. Who did the canning and what vegetables and fruits were canned? How?
12. If you lived on a farm, what crops were planted?
13. Who did the work? Family? Hired Hands?

14. Did you and livestock cows, hogs, chickens, etc.?
15. What kind of meat did you eat? How often? Did you slaughter your own animals?  
How often?
16. Did you keep a cow for milk?
17. Did you make your own butter? Cheese?

## Grandparents

1. What were the names of your mother's parents?
2. When and where were they born? Where did they live?
3. What did he and/or she do for a living?
4. Do you have any personal memories of them? Describe.
5. What were the names of your father's parents?
6. When and where were they born? Where did they live?
7. What did he and/or she do for a living?
8. Do you have any special memories of them
9. Did you learn any important life lesson from them?
10. Did any of your grandparents live with your family?
11. Did you know your grandparents well?
12. What do you remember hearing about your great-grandparents? Do you know anything about them.
13. Did you ever meet your great-grandparents?
14. Did your great-grandparents, grandparents or parents come to the U.S. from a foreign country? What stories are told in your family about their journey? Do you have any relatives in foreign countries?
15. What traditions are still practiced in your family?
16. What family stories or memories were passed down to you from your parents or grandparents?

## Days, Seasons and Special Occasions

1. How did the family spend its evenings and weekends?
2. What did Saturday mean to you?
3. Was Saturday night bath night?
4. What did Sunday mean to you?
5. Did you attend a weekly religious service? Alone? With your parents or family or friends?
6. Where did you attend a religious service?
7. What holidays did you celebrate?
8. What winter holidays did your family celebrate: Christmas? Hanukkah? Kwanza? Describe how you spent the holidays? Did you decorate, exchange gifts? Did you visit relatives?
9. What kind of gifts did you receive for the holidays? Did you buy gifts for others? How did you pay for them? Did you earn your own money?
10. Did your family observe Easter? In what way?
11. How did you observe the Fourth of July? Where?
12. How was your birthday celebrated? Did you have a birthday cake?

13. What kinds of gifts did you receive on your birthday?
14. Did your family entertain often? What were the occasions?
15. Did your family attend picnics? Family reunions? What do you remember about them?
16. What were summers like and what did you do in the summer?
17. How did you keep cool in the summer?
18. Did you go barefoot in summer?
19. What were the winters like and what did you do in the winter? What did you wear in winter to keep warm?
20. Do you remember any blizzards or tornadoes or floods? Or, other natural disasters or fires?
21. How did these events affect the neighbors, relatives, or town? How did they affect you?

## Friends and Games

1. What did you do for recreation?
2. Did you or your brothers or sisters have any hobbies? If so, what?
3. Who were your playmates?
4. Who was your best friend?
5. What did you and your friends do when you got together?
6. Did you and your playmates play any organized games or sports? Describe
7. Did you ever attend fairs or carnivals?
8. Did you participate in 4-H or scouting or other organizations?

## School

1. Were you homeschooled or attend school outside the home?
2. Did you ever attend a one room school? Describe.
3. How did you get to school? If you walked, how far?
4. What do you remember about these walks? Did you walk alone or with friends? Did you encounter animals along the way, friendly or otherwise?
5. Were these walks a hardship in winter? In summer or hot weather?
6. How large were the schools you attended and what grades in each school?
7. What recreation was provided or allowed during periods of rest or recess?
8. Were you helped by older students or did you help others with their lessons?
9. How did you do in school? What were your favorite subjects? Who were your favorite teachers?

## Transportation and Surroundings

1. Did you live in a small town or on the farm? Describe.
2. Where did your parents shop? Describe the stores.
3. Did they ever go to the city to shop? Describe.
4. What was the largest town you remember visiting when you were young? What did you do there?

5. Did you ever travel on a train while you were young? What was the occasion? Where did you go and with whom?
6. Were you ever away from home as a child?
7. What was your family's day-to-day transportation? Did you walk to many places?
8. Did you or your family own a horse? A buggy? Were you able or allowed to ride?
9. When did your family acquire its first car? Do you remember the make? Do you know how much it cost?
10. When did you learn to drive a car? Who taught you?
11. Did your family ever go on vacation? Where?

## Higher Education and Career

1. What education did you get past high school? Did your family support, oppose, or encourage you?
2. When did you finally settle into your career? Was it what you hoped to do when you grew up?
3. While you were in college or in training, did you live away from home? For how long?
4. Who influenced you most and helped you to develop your skills?
5. What is your occupation? Describe your career: Training for your job, promotions, employers you worked for, associates, achievements.
6. Would you choose the same career if you had it to do over?

## Marriage and Later Life

1. When and where did you meet your husband or wife?
2. When and where were they born?
3. How and when did you get engaged?
4. How and when did you get married? Where did you marry and who was present?
5. Did you go on a honeymoon? Describe.
6. Where was your first home? Describe your home.
7. How many moves have you made during your married life? Where and why? Describe.
8. Where and when were your children born?
9. What can you remember of their baby days and childhood?
10. What is your spouse's occupation?
11. Did you or your spouse go into military service?
12. If your spouse went into service, what did you do while he or she was away? Where did you live?
13. Did that service include wartime? What memories do you have of war years?
14. Have you been politically active during your lifetime?
15. Were there any health issues in your family?
16. Did you have animals or pets?
17. What activities did your family do together?
18. When and where did you vacation?
19. Who have been your closest friends through the years?
20. To what organizations have you belonged?

21. What things have given you the most pleasure or satisfaction? Your family, home, career, possessions, hobbies?
22. What is your greatest achievements? Why?

## Outlook

1. Whom did you most admire when you were young? Within the family? Within public life? Why?
2. Did you choose someone to pattern your life after? Who and why?
3. What do you have to say about all the changes that have taken place within your lifetime? Transportation? Communications? Global changes?
4. In your opinion, which have been the greatest advances or inventions of all that you have witnessed?
5. What do you want people to remember the most about you?

## Helpful Links

*Links can be found at <http://cheboygangenealogy.com/>*

### Online genealogical platforms.

- [Welcome to FamilySearch](#)
- [Genealogy, Family Trees and Family History Records online - Ancestry.com](#)
- [Free Family Tree, Genealogy, Family History, and DNA Testing My Heritage](#)
- [Find Your Ancestors, Family Tree & History - Genealogy & Ancestry I Findmypast.com I Findmypast.com](#)

### Online Research resources

- [Welcome to Cyndi's List](#) A comprehensive, categorized & cross-referenced list of links that point you to genealogical research sites online.
- LDSGenealogy.com is a free website designed to help you quickly locate more record sources for your U.S. ancestors. <https://ldsgenealogy.com/index.htm>
- FamilySearch [Learning Center](#) and [Research Wiki](#)

### Free Blank Forms to use in recording research

- [Free Charts and Forms](#) from Ancestry.com
- [Family History Forms I Mid-Continent Public Library](#)

- Free Resources from Family Tree Magazine <https://familytreemagazine.com/free-genealogy-resources/>

## **Educational resources**

- [RootsTech](#) is the largest genealogical conference in the world. You can attend online and utilize the large catalog of online videos throughout the year. It uses the same logon as FamilySerch.
- [Family History Beginner's Guides I Family History Daily](#)

Below are **YouTube** genealogy channels for learning both basic and advanced concepts in genealogy. Each offers free-access videos that do not require membership.

- [Aimee Cross, Genealogy Hints](#) – Aimee offers a wide variety of brief and practical tips videos, including guidance for Ancestry, FamilySearch, and personal research.
- [Allen County Public Library](#) – This library is one of the foremost in the U.S. for genealogy research.
- [American Ancestors](#) – Sponsored by the New England Historic Genealogical Society, this channel has great resources for many aspects of United States research.
- [Genealogy with Amy Johnson Crow](#) – Amy offers practical advice on solving many types of research problems.
- [Ancestry](#) – The Ancestry YouTube channel has been around for quite a while, offering tips and strategies from genealogy experts Crista Cowan, Anne Mitchell, etc., with nearly half a million subscribers.
- [BYU Family History Library](#) – A large number of individual experts come together to create and share videos on many different genealogy topics. They are approaching 1,000 videos on the channel.
- [Family History Fanatics](#) – The husband and wife team of Andy and Devon Noel Lee offer many practical, problem-solving videos, including quite a few on DNA research topics.
- [FamilySearch](#) – The FamilySearch YouTube channel is a go-to place for family historians
- [Genealogy TV](#) – Connie Knox hosts one of the most successful and well-known YouTube channels for genealogy, with nearly 100K subscribers.
- [Lisa Louise Cooke's Genealogy Gems](#) – Lisa Louise is a familiar name in genealogy circles, and her YouTube channel has videos that span a wide variety of technologies and strategies.
- [Family Tree Magazine \(US\)](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC954xihCH_I3ayzpcEOKmzQ) [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC954xihCH\\_I3ayzpcEOKmzQ](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC954xihCH_I3ayzpcEOKmzQ)
- [MyHeritage](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCT_enUFr_ZjlfuA6s55y_Lw) [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCT\\_enUFr\\_ZjlfuA6s55y\\_Lw](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCT_enUFr_ZjlfuA6s55y_Lw)
- [FindMyPast](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCQcklvf6Ddt1PCmQyBggRBQ) <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCQcklvf6Ddt1PCmQyBggRBQ>
- [Legacy Family Tree](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-oKrv9-9pq4o8KuRSLrIPA) <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-oKrv9-9pq4o8KuRSLrIPA>
- [RootsMagic](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCIAeFYGdN0CRVehqGjDDTgg) <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCIAeFYGdN0CRVehqGjDDTgg>