

Tips for Getting Started

Write Down What You Know:

- *Names:* Start with your parents, and then include info about grandparents and great-grandparents. (It is easiest to work backwards.)
- *Dates:* These may include birthdates, marriage dates, christening or confirmation dates, death dates, or any other significant life events.
- *Places:* Where did your ancestors live? Write down anything you know, including places of birth, marriage, death, burial, or a family move.

Use Family Resources:

- Go through your home to find records, which may include photos, letters, journals, birth or death certificates, marriage records, newspaper clippings, obituaries, employment records, military records, etc.
- Talk to your family members. Find out if they have any records you have been unable to locate. You never know if an aunt, uncle, cousin, or grandparent has the information you are looking for.
- Search genealogy forums or message boards to find out if you have distant cousins doing research. They might have information you need, or you might have what they are searching for.
- Interview family members. Talk to your parents, grandparents, and other relatives about their life experiences. Genealogy is more than just names and dates, so be sure to ask questions that will get more than a yes/no response. Make sure you record these answers by writing them down, or make an audio/video recording. These stories and experiences are an important part of your family's history! If you do not live near your relatives, you might choose to write them a letter.
- Record your own story. Your descendants will want to know what you did and what your life was like. Gather records and clippings, label your photographs, make a scrapbook, keep a journal, or make a video – anything to document your story. Be aware that some media formats are not as long-lived as others. Keep your CDs and DVDs away from heat and sunlight, back up your computer files frequently, print out important photos or emails, etc.

Now For Some Research!

- **Select an ancestor** to search for. Important selection criteria may include:
 - Individual is deceased
 - Records are available for the time period
 - Individual's name is known
 - Approximate birth or death date is known
 - Location (city/state/country) of birth, marriage, or death is known
- A great starting point is the **census**. Some important information to consider:
 - The most recent census available for search is the 1930 Census (1940 will be made available in 2012.)
 - The 1870 census was the first to record the names of all African Americans.
 - 1850 and 1860 census records listed slaves, but did not include names. These list only the names of slave owners, as well as the age, sex, and color of slaves. These are useful when tracing a family backwards from the 1870 census.
 - The 1890 census was almost completely destroyed by a fire. A few records still exist.
- You may find other important information when you search for your ancestor using the following records:
 - Birth Certificate/Birth Record
 - Death Certificate/Death Record
 - Marriage record
 - Obituary
 - Funeral Home Record
 - Cemetery Records (*your ancestor may be buried near family or have significant information carved on their tombstone.*)
 - Freedmen's Bank Records

The records listed above may include names of parents, siblings, spouse, or children, and possibly important dates and locations for those individuals. Use this new data to fill in information you did not already know.

- Other recommended resources include wills, probate records, church records, court records, and military records. You may also find male ancestors using WWI and WWII draft registration records.

Stuck? Frustrated? Ask a genealogist, archivist, or librarian for help and suggestions.

Not all librarians have genealogy experience, so the more specific your request is, the more likely they will be able to help you find appropriate resources.

