GENEALOGY

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"Enhancing our youths' competitive edge through merit badges"

Scouting America

Requirements

Scouts should go to www.scouting.org/merit-badges/Genealogy or check Scoutbook for the latest requirements.

Contents

Introduction

Exploring your roots—where your family name came from, why your family lives where it does, what your parents and grandparents did for fun when they were your age—can be fascinating. Discovering your *ancestors*—your parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and so on—back through history is what *genealogy* is all about.

Doing genealogical research is like being a private investigator. Getting started is easy: You list your name, your birthday, and the places you have lived. Then you record the same information for your brothers and sisters and your parents and their parents. This pamphlet will help you find and organize the information you gather, learn new skills, and gain a new appreciation of who you are.

The Influence of Family and Personal History on Society

As you research your family, you will discover what life was like for your ancestors and will feel more connected to them. You might find out how your grandmother felt when her first child was born or what your great-grandfather did for a living.

Daily life might not have changed as much as we may be led to believe. As you trace your ancestors' history, you may learn that they lived in a different country, ate different food, or wore different clothes, but you probably will find that the same things that make life meaningful to you today are the things that made life meaningful to your ancestors.

Several suggested activities for this merit badge involve extensive online reading and research. It is strongly advised that Scouts view the **Personal Safety Awareness videos** before starting work. Find details at www.scouting.org/training/youth-protection/scouts-bsa

Tips for Online Safety

The internet is a useful and convenient tool. But you should use the internet only with your parent or guardian's permission and knowledge, and when you are online, be careful to guard your privacy and protect yourself from potentially harmful situations.

These tips will help you stay safe. Your parent, guardian, counselor, or librarian may talk with you about other rules.

- Follow your family's or school's rules for going online. Respect any limits on how long and how often you are allowed to be online and what sites you can visit.

- Protect your privacy. Never exchange emails or give out personal information such as your phone number, your address, your last name, where you go to school, or where your parents or guardians work, without first asking your parent or guardian's permission. Get your parent or guardian's permission before sending anyone any family photographs.

- Only open emails or files you receive from people you know and trust. If you get something suspicious, trash it just as you would any other junk mail.

- If you receive or discover any information that makes you uncomfortable, do not respond. Immediately tell your parent, guardian, or another responsible adult.

- Never agree to get together with someone you meet online, unless your parent or guardian approves and goes with you.

- Keep your internet password a secret.

- Always get your parent or guardian's permission before doing any online shopping.

- Remember that not everything you see or read online is reliable. Along with lots of great information, the internet has lots of junk. Learn to separate the useful from the worthless. Talk with your counselor or another experienced adult web user about ways to tell the difference.

- Be a good online citizen. Do not do anything that harms others or is against the law.

Your Life and Your Family History

No one knows more about you than you. The easiest place to start your family history is with your own history. You can begin your life story by doing some of the following activities.

Writing a Journal

You should write in your journal on a regular basis—every day, every week, or every month. It is a log of your activities, thoughts, and feelings. You can write about things such as:

- Family milestones, such as births, graduations, awards, deaths

- Where you live and the room in which you sleep

- What you ate for breakfast, lunch, or dinner

- Your likes and dislikes

- The people you live with

- Other relatives and friends

- What happened in school or with your friends

- After-school and weekend activities

- Your future plans— what you hope to do or want to be

This list is just a suggestion of some topics you might discuss in your journal. Write about what is important to you.

Recording Your Life Story

A personal history, or life story, tells about what happened in the past. It may include quotes or stories from your journal or diary. In a small way, writing about your own and your family's history helps preserve the history of our nation. Start your life story by listing the following:

• Your full name

• The date and place of your birth

• The full names of your mother and father, brothers and sisters, and other relatives

• The addresses of any places you have lived

Then write about what you know or remember about your past and current life. You might describe the following:

• Your earliest memories

• The different places you have lived

• Your friends and what you do together

• What your father, mother, or other relatives do (or did) for a living

• Errands or household duties

• Any health problems you have had

• Hobbies

• Community activities

• Vacations

• Favorite sports, books, or music

• Schools you have attended

• Your favorite and least favorite subjects in school

You might also tell about happy, funny, or hard times in your life. Be honest about your thoughts and feelings.

Anne Frank:
A Diary of Hope Amid Tragedy

One of the finest examples of a young person recording their life story is Anne Frank. This German-Dutch teenager of Jewish heritage became one of the most discussed victims of the Holocaust (the mass murder of European Jews and other groups by the Nazi Germans before and during World War II) when her diary writings were posthumously (meaning, after her death)

Anne Frank's passport photo, taken in May 1942, one month before her family was forced into hiding.

published in 1947. In *The Diary of a Young Girl* (originally titled *The Secret Annex*) she documents her life in hiding from 1942 to 1944, during the German occupation of the Netherlands in World War II. It is one of the world's best-known books and has been the basis for several plays and films.

In October 1942, 13-year-old Anne dreamed of a career as a film star in Hollywood. Two years later, her greatest wish was to publish a book about her time in hiding. What development did Anne go through in the secret annex?

You might want to consider her story as well as some other well-known published journals and diaries for examples of what you want to record.

Remember what Anne Frank once wrote about keeping a journal: "I can shake off everything as I write; my sorrows disappear, my courage is reborn." (Anne Frank: *The Diary of a Young Girl*, p. 177)
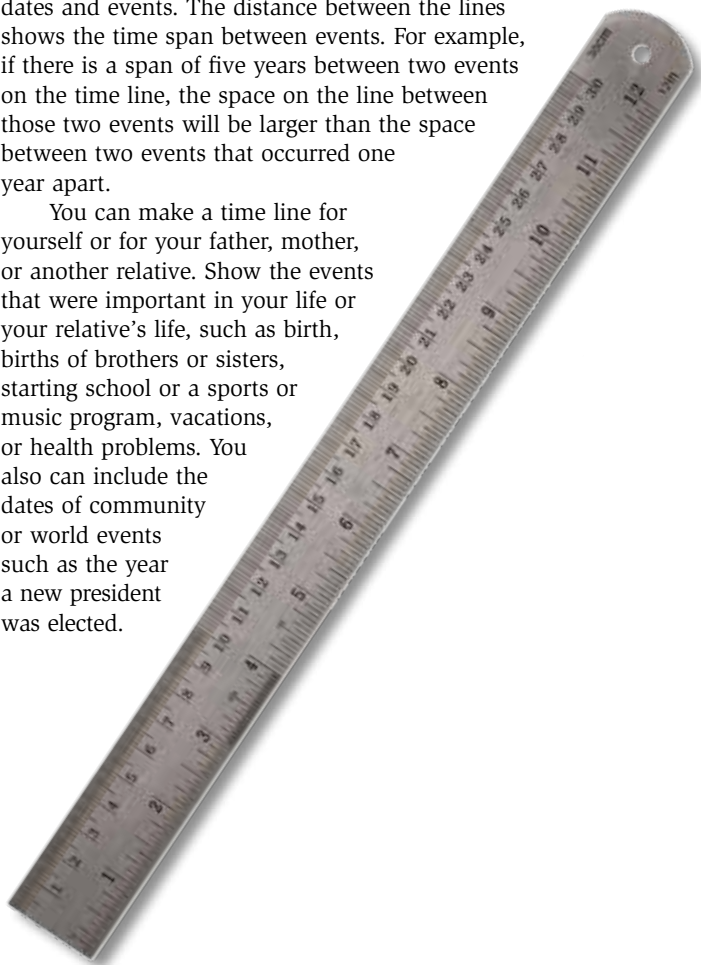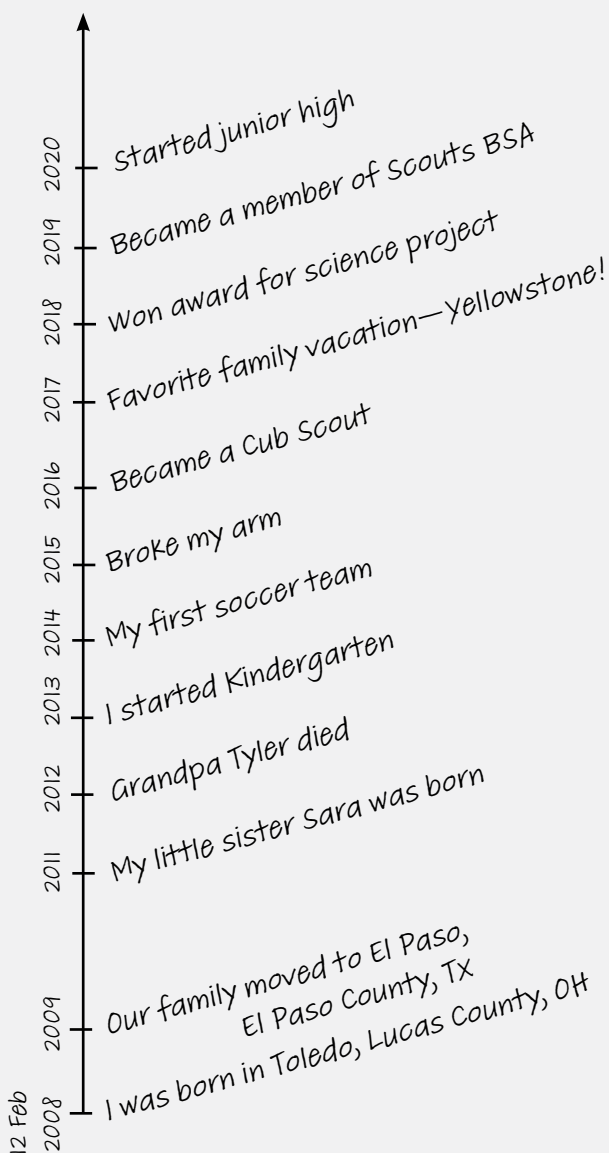
Making a Time Line

A *time line* is a chart that shows the *events* in a person's life. A time line can show the events from a person's birth until the present or from birth until death if the person has died.

You can make a time line as simple or as complex as you like. It should include at least 10 items. If you want to make a detailed, illustrated time line, use large paper (such as butcher paper) so you will have plenty of space for drawing or for adding photographs. If you choose not to illustrate your time line, an 8$\frac{1}{2}$-by-11-inch sheet of paper will work well.

The time line shown here has a horizontal line that represents a person's life. The vertical lines indicate dates and events. The distance between the lines shows the time span between events. For example, if there is a span of five years between two events on the time line, the space on the line between those two events will be larger than the space between two events that occurred one year apart.

You can make a time line for yourself or for your father, mother, or another relative. Show the events that were important in your life or your relative's life, such as birth, births of brothers or sisters, starting school or a sports or music program, vacations, or health problems. You also can include the dates of community or world events such as the year a new president was elected.

Started junior high — 2020

Became a member of Scouts BSA — 2019

Won award for science project — 2018

Favorite family vacation—Yellowstone! — 2017

Became a Cub Scout — 2016

Broke my arm — 2015

My first soccer team — 2014

I started Kindergarten — 2013

Grandpa Tyler died — 2012

My little sister Sara was born — 2011

Our family moved to El Paso, El Paso County, TX — 2009

I was born in Toledo, Lucas County, OH — 2008 12 Feb

Gathering Information From Family Members

When you interview a relative, you begin the process of collecting genealogical information about your family. You can then start preparing a family tree, or pedigree chart. When making a family tree, try to gather information from several sources so you can evaluate and decide which information is the most accurate. Research into any subject consists of deciding which questions you want answered and then collecting information until you have found the answers. For example:

Pages from a family Bible can tell you important dates in the family's history.

- **Whom** do you want to learn more about?
- **What** do you want to know about these individuals?
- **When** did certain events take place, such as births, marriages, or deaths?
- **Where** did those events take place?
- **How** did your ancestors get from one place to another?
- **Why** might your ancestors have made certain choices in life?

A family history tells of the family as a unit and describes each person. It might include quotes or stories from different relatives. A family history should include as many generations as possible. When gathering family information from relatives, you will need to talk or write to them to obtain information about their lives. You might ask about the following:

- Their full names
- What they do (or did) for a living
- The names of their parents, brothers, and sisters

- What their clothes, food, and homes were like when they were growing up

- Where they lived and what the community was like

- Community activities they were involved in

- Military service and what it was like

- Choices they made in life such as whether or not to go to college or to take a certain job

- Stories of things that happened to them—the funniest, the most embarrassing, the one they learned the most from, or the one they feel is most important to share

To get the right answers in genealogy, you must begin by asking the right questions. Then you must know where to go to find accurate answers. The first place to start is your home.

Do this in person or by phone, email, or letter. Longtime neighbors may add helpful information. If your family moved to the United States from another country, it is important to ask your parents or guardians and other relatives about the country where they lived. Even if you are not formally interviewing all these people, write down or record the information they tell you.

Not all the information someone tells you is necessarily correct. Relationships (such as great-uncle Ralph was Grandpa Erickson's brother) are usually correct. But names, places, and dates may not be accurate. People tend to forget details. Double-check the information you gather against other records.

Look for the following sources of history in your home:

- Certificates (of birth, baptism, marriage, death)

- Birth announcements

- Funeral programs, obituaries, and other newspaper clippings

- Wedding invitations and announcements

- Family Bibles

- Letters, diaries, and journals

- Military records and other personal records

- Deeds and wills

- Photographs

After locating these, visit other relatives (or call or write to them) to find out what records they have. It can be fun to talk to them and discover what they have and to hear what they know.

Family heirlooms can be good sources of historical information. Memorabilia such as war medals, report cards, and newspaper clippings might give a glimpse of an ancestor's personality.

Gathering Information From Records and Other Sources

After you have gathered as much information as you can from your family, it is time to start searching through records. Records will help you make sure the information you have gathered from your family is correct and will help you discover new information that your family did not know.

Helpful Genealogical Records

Now for the great mystery in genealogy—which records do you use? It is really not much of a mystery at all. Just think about how many records about you there already are. A birth certificate was issued when you were born. Your place of worship may have a record of your birth or of ceremonies you participated in. Schools you have attended have records on you as well. These are some of the basic record types that are often used in genealogy.

A good place to start looking for records is your local library or genealogical society. To find out if your community or county has a genealogical society, use an internet search engine. If there is not such an organization near enough for you to visit, you can always call or write to one. The staff cannot trace your ancestors for you, but they can point you in the right direction.

Even if your parents or ancestors were not born in the United States or Canada, there are usually records made about them in the country where they lived. Many of the records are of the same type as those used in the United States. Use a research guide for the country to find the records that will be most helpful. Such research guides and other helps can be

Get your parent or guardian's permission before using the internet to search for family records.

found by using the internet sites www.cyndislist.com or www.familysearch.org along with other websites mentioned in the resources section.

Using Vital Records

Vital records are created to record births, marriages, and deaths. By obtaining copies of these kinds of certificates, you can get accurate information about names, dates, places, and other details from your ancestors' lives. These records may be created by governments or by families.

> Some families keep a record of the names and birth dates of all family members. In earlier times, many people recorded vital events in the family Bible.

In the United States, each state now creates the basic vital records. This has not always been the case. In many parts of the country, counties created these records, while in other areas (in some New England states), towns created them. Hundreds of years ago in Europe and colonial America, religious institutions often were the only groups that kept such records. Records made by a place of worship, however, are not called "vital records." We call them "church records" or "religious institution records." Such records can be very helpful if you are researching ancestors who were born or married in another country or in this country at a time when government records were not kept.

Christenings (baptisms) in the parish register of Poynton, Cheshire, England, 1766.

Locating Various Vital Records

"Where to Write for Vital Records" tells when a state began to keep vital records and gives the address and amount of the fee you need to pay to get copies of certificates of birth, death, marriage, or divorce. This pamphlet also will tell you where the records for modern time periods are housed. They may be in state archives, vital statistics bureaus, or state libraries. Records created by counties are usually stored in the county courthouse. Town records are normally in the office or home of the town clerk. You often can get copies of these records (on microfilm, microfiche, or printed in books) in genealogical libraries.

"Where to Write for Vital Records" is available free on the internet at www.cdc.gov/nchs/w2w/. The same information is also available at www.vitalrec.com. If you do not have access to the internet at home, find out whether your local library has the internet available.

If your parents or ancestors came from another country, the *International Vital Records Handbook* can help you find out where to obtain birth, marriage, and death records for them (see the resources section). This book is available at many public libraries and contains instructions and forms for ordering vital records from more than 200 countries.

Using Indexes to Vital Records and Other Records

Many genealogical records have *indexes* that make them easier to use. An index takes all the names from a large number of records and puts them in alphabetical order, so you do not have to waste time looking randomly through several volumes of records. Sometimes the index is in the record. Often it is a separate volume. Indexes to state vital records are sometimes available in major genealogical libraries, such as the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, Utah. In addition, there are many indexes to vital records on the internet.

An index is just a shortcut for finding a record. It does not contain the full content of the record itself. You should always try to find a copy of the *original record.* For example, an index of birth records may include the person's name and birth date but may not include the names of the person's parents.

There is another good reason why you should always try to find the original record. Every index has at least a few mistakes in it. Sometimes the mistakes are small, such as the misspelling of a name, but other times a mistake such as the one shown below could throw you completely off the trail of your ancestors.
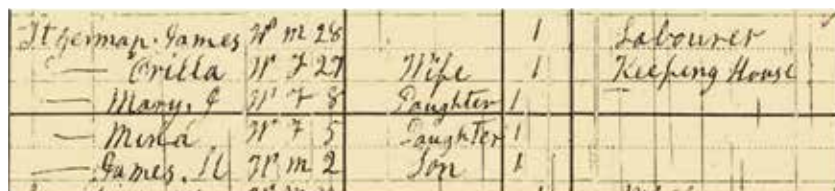
The index showed the family's surname as Styerman. The family's surname was actually St. German. By looking at the handwriting on the original record, you can see how the person who copied the record for the index misread the name.

Some records have been destroyed by fire or other disasters. For example, many records in the southeastern United States were destroyed in the Civil War (1861–65). And in other cases, the records may never have been created. Just after the war people were too busy trying to rebuild and survive to bother with making vital records.

When government records are not available, then family and religious institution records become more important. Good supplements also are found in federal and state censuses and military records.

1880 U.S. Census Index, www.familysearch.org

Using Census Records

Census records are another major type of record used in genealogy. Census records are created to help determine the number of representatives for government, how many people should pay taxes, and similar information. Census records help us piece together family histories because they often list the people who are living together in the same house. Census records exist for most countries.

In the United States, census records are one of our best genealogical sources. U.S. census records began in 1790, and in 1850 U.S. census records began to list every family member by name.
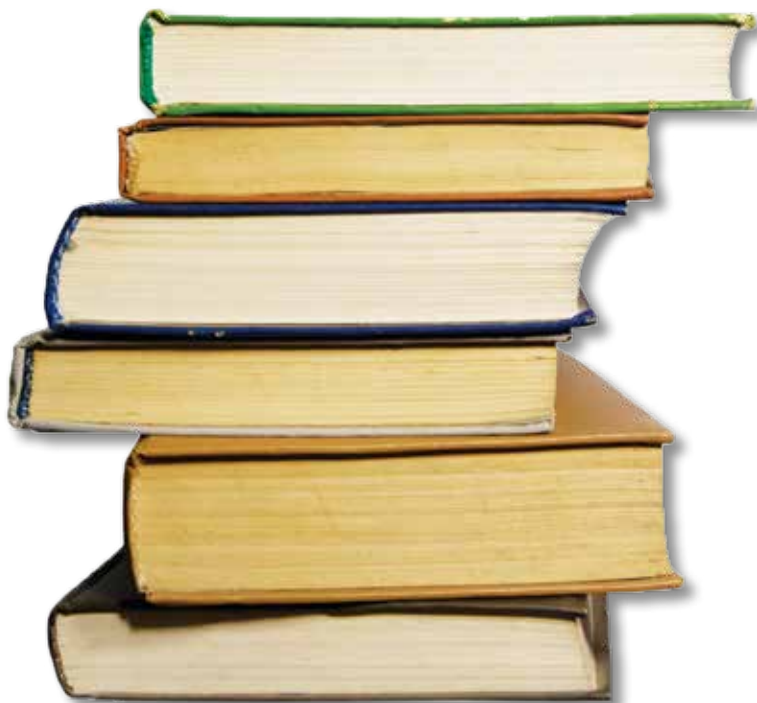
Among the legacies of slavery is the way in which enslaved African Americans were counted in U.S. censuses from 1790 to 1860. They were listed only by their first names. It was not until slavery was outlawed that African Americans who had once been slaves were able to choose surnames. Members of the same family did not always take the same name, which can make compiling an in-depth family history extra challenging.

U.S. federal census records are taken every 10 years. They are arranged by state and then usually by county within each state. Several types of indexes often are available to help you find the record of a specific person or family within the census record. The internet has many of these indexes, together with scanned images of the actual census, and some of the services are free to use.

If you need to find census records for a country other than the United States, check a research guide. You can learn which years censuses exist for particular countries and how to access them.

A wealth of genealogical information can be found when you locate the record of your ancestor's family in the U.S. census. The censuses of 1880, 1900, 1910, and 1920 are particularly rich in detail. The 1850, 1860, and 1870 census records are helpful, but they give less information about each person. The majority of the 1890 census was destroyed by fire.

Census records do not become available until 72 years after the census was taken. Until then, everything in the census is private and can be obtained only by a close relative, who must show a need to have a copy of the entry from the census record. The latest census available as of April 2022 is the 1950 census.

To find a relative in a census record you need to know the following:

- **The name the relative was using.** For a married female ancestor this is important because she would be listed under her maiden surname prior to marriage. After she married, she would be listed under her married surname.

- **The place where the relative was living at the time of the census.** If you are looking for a person in a U.S. census, for example, you need to know which state and county the person was living in at the time the census was taken. In a county, you need to know which town your relative lived in. In a city, you should know the person's address or at least which part of the city he or she lived in.

Steps for Finding Someone on the Census

Step 1—Decide which census you want to search.

Step 2—Is it on the internet? Many U.S. censuses available (and many for other countries) are on the internet.

Step 3—Is it indexed? All of the available U.S. censuses are indexed. You can access the indexes by searching the following websites: www.familysearch.org, www.ancestry.com, and www.genealogy.com. Be sure you know whether the index you are using includes every name on the census or only the heads of households. Knowing this will affect your search strategy.

Step 4—Is there a local library, genealogical society, or Family History Center near you that has a subscription to the above websites? Access to the censuses on these websites is not free.

If there is a good *statewide index,* you may not need to know exactly where the relative lived within the county or state. However, if you do have this information, it will help you recognize your family if several people in the area have the same name.

| MARRIAGE INDEX | | GUIDE | | |
NAME	PLACE	VOL.	NUMBER	YEAR
Antes, David Merritt	Broward	244	6270	1934
Anthony, Beatrice Florence	Broward	266	17059	1934
Anthony, Jamie Laruth	Taylor	276	22467	1934
Anthony, John M.	Dade	236	2377	1934
Anthony, Johnie Lee	Marion	250	9229	1934
Anthony, Laura Inez	Hillsboro	262	15186	1934
Anthony, Lucy	Duval	260	14125	1934
Anthony, Neva Mable	Pinellas	268	18046	1934
Anthony, Sidney	Duval	236	2455	1934
Antinori, Angelina	Hillsboro	237	2824	1934
Antinori, Joseph	Hillsboro	257	12884	1934

Using Newspapers

You can find information about your ancestors in newspaper articles. You may find some in your home or in libraries or in newspaper offices. Obituaries and birth and wedding notices are where you will most often find family history information.

Tens of thousands of newspapers have been published in the United States, past and present. When looking for information about your ancestors, do not overlook smaller newspapers that cater to a particular city neighborhood, ethnic or racial group, or religious group. For example, more than 5,000 African American newspapers have been published at one time or another, some dating back to the early 1800s. Such newspapers might have printed a detailed obituary of your ancestor if he or she was well-known in the community, whereas large-circulation newspapers often print only brief death notices. A librarian can help you find newspapers that might be useful to you and can assist you in obtaining microfilm copies if they are available.

Using Cemeteries

Tombstones are a great source of information about people. For many cemeteries, the names, dates, and other information on tombstones have been copied, or transcribed, and the information put into books or on the internet. A local genealogical society or Family History Center might be able to help you locate a *transcription* of a cemetery that is too far away for you to visit.

Books about the history of towns and counties often include biographical sketches of early settlers and leading citizens. If your ancestors have been in the United States for several generations, you may find information about your ancestors in one of these books.

Using Family and Local Histories

Family histories—those put together by family members—are another source of genealogical information. Relatives may have kept a copy of their family history in their homes, but sometimes they are available in libraries. They may be just lists of family members with their dates and places of birth, marriage, and death, plus the names of relatives. Or they may include detailed biographical information about each person.

Using Family Organizations

An extended family organization is one that includes your grandparents, aunts, uncles, and first cousins. It also may include your great-grandparents, your grandaunts and granduncles, and your second cousins. Members of your extended family can be helpful in telling you about your family history and genealogy.

In addition to these informal family organizations, two types of more formal family organizations are organized with genealogical purposes in mind: ancestral family organizations and surname organizations.

Ancestral family organizations are created around an ancestral couple and include all of their descendants. For example, John and Jane Clough who came to America in the early 1600s are the center of a Clough family organization. Everyone who belongs to this organization should be able to trace his or her ancestry to this couple. The purposes of a family organization are to do good research into the ancestry and descendants of a couple and to record and share the information. Such an organization often publishes extensive family genealogies and newsletters that may be available in some major libraries.

A surname organization is based on a surname that is associated with a specific geographical area and time period. The geographical area may be quite small, or it may include an entire country. For example, the Deweese Family of America

Lineage Societies

Lineage societies are organizations that require a person to be able to trace and document his or her ancestry to the group of people the society is honoring. For example, the Society of California Pioneers is for the descendants of California settlers before the gold rush (pre-1850). The International Society of Sons and Daughters of Slave Ancestry is a lineage society that honors ancestors who were enslaved. Lineage societies have both national and local chapters. Your local library or genealogical society can help you identify and obtain current addresses for lineage societies that may be of interest to you.

covers the entire United States from the 1680s to the present. Surname organizations are interested in the genealogical records of anyone with the surname, and they use the information they collect to try to establish various family relationships. A surname organization often records this information and deposits it in a library or archive where interested persons can access the information.

Using Genealogical Periodicals

Genealogical periodicals or magazines can provide helpful information on how and where to find sources. Information taken from censuses and vital records (from counties, towns, religious institutions, cemeteries, and family records) may also be published in them. Some of these magazines are listed in the resources section of this pamphlet. Contact your local or state genealogical society for a list of periodicals that would be helpful for your research.

> Many of the periodical articles have been indexed in the Periodical Source Index, or PERSI for short. You can search PERSI for free at www.findmypast.com.

Deciding Which Records to Use

Now that you are familiar with the types of records that are available, you can start thinking about what information you want to track down. Here is one example of some steps you might take to uncover new information.

Step 1—Decide what you want to find out. For example, "Who were my great-grandpa's parents?"

Step 2—Find out what kind of record will give you that information. You might recall that your birth certificate gives the names of your parents, so maybe your great-grandpa's birth certificate will give the names of his parents. You also remember that your mother told you your great-grandpa was born about 1903 in Massachusetts.

Step 3—Find out where the records you need can be found. If you discover that records for births in Massachusetts in 1903 are available at the Family History Library, you could rent a microfilm copy from a local Family History Center and get a copy that way. Many can be obtained online; see the resources section.

The Family History Library and Family History Centers

The Family History Library was founded in 1894 to aid members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints with their genealogical research. Today the FHL is the largest genealogical library in the world and is open to the general public. Anyone can use the library's resources free of charge. In addition, thousands of associated branch libraries called Family History Centers are located throughout the world. Family History Centers are often located in local meetinghouses of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and staffed by volunteers. Most Family History Centers have computers with internet access to genealogy websites.

The FHL's collection includes more than two million rolls of microfilm and thousands of bound books. New microfilm of genealogical records from all over the world is continually being made.

All of the library's holdings are described in the FamilySearch Catalog, which is available on the internet at www.familysearch.org. Most of the microfilms in the FHL's collection can be rented through a local Family History Center. Usually the films must be ordered, and there is a small fee to cover the postage and other expenses.

This new information enables you to start the process over again with a new question. For example, you might now decide to see what you could find out about your great-grandfather's brothers and sisters. A census record would list the whole family together, so you might decide to look at the first census that was taken after your great-grandfather was born. A librarian at your local library could help you access a website the library subscribes to that indexes census data. Suppose you find that the census you want—the 1910 census—is not available. That is not a problem. You go to Plan B and search

the 1920 census, which has been indexed. Your experience searching the census record might go something like this:

Librarian: "Just type in *Edward Quinn* and choose Massachusetts as the state."

You: "There are no matches."

Librarian: "Are you sure he lived in Massachusetts in 1920?"

You: "Maybe not. I think my mom said that the family lived in Rhode Island, too."

Librarian: "Let's try that."

You: "Still no matches."

Librarian: "Do you know anything else about Edward's family?"

You: "I know his father's name was Michael and his mother's name was Catherine."

Librarian: "Maybe we should try searching on *Michael Quinn* in Rhode Island."

You: "There are 11 matches! One has a wife Catherine and a teenage son named Edward!"

Librarian: "Looks like you found what you were looking for."

As you can see, you do not always get instant results. Sometimes you need to do a little creative thinking to come up with another name or place that may yield the results you are looking for. When you find a useful census record, make a copy of it. The record can give you quite a bit of information, including the ages and names of family members.

How to Use the Information You Gather

As you gather information on your family, you may find that some of it includes errors and/or contradictions. Contradictions occur when two records show different things. When you find an error or contradiction, you have to figure out which sources are the most trustworthy. You might need to do some detective work in evaluating the material you have gathered.

Practice your genealogy detective skills by reading the following story. See if you can catch the errors and contradictions.

Case Study

Your dad tells you that your grandpa—his dad—Zacharias Smith, was born January 26, 1925, in Portland, Multnomah County, Oregon, to parents Ebenezer Smith and Sara Woodbury. Your dad also told you that Ebenezer was a famous lumberjack. You go to a local library and find a history of Portland, Oregon. Believe it or not, you find Ebenezer mentioned as a lumberjack, but it does not say that he was particularly famous. The book mentions Sara, but it gives her maiden name as Woodburn, not Woodbury. You decide to get Zacharias' birth certificate, hoping that it will tell you his parents' names. It does, and there Sara's name is listed as Sara Elizabeth Woodbury (she was also the informant, that is, the person who informed the clerk of the birth). The birth certificate also says that Zacharias was born January 22, 1925. You check the 1930 census to find out how old Ebenezer and Sara were. You find them in Portland with Zacharias and his brothers and sisters. Ebenezer was a 35-year-old lumberjack and Sara was a 37-year-old housewife. The census also shows that he was born in Tennessee and she was born in Nebraska.

What was Sara's maiden name? Two out of three of your sources said her name was Woodbury, while only one said Woodburn. Also, which of the three sources is most likely to be trustworthy? Zacharias' birth certificate is probably the most reliable (as long as the clerk who wrote the record did not

make a mistake) because the information about her name came from Sara herself. Your dad's memory is a pretty reliable source. The least reliable source would be the Portland history. That is because it is not a firsthand source, and you are not sure where the author got the information.

About when were Ebenezer and Sara born? You can estimate their years of birth because you know how old they were at the time of the 1930 census. If you subtract Ebenezer's age, 35, from 1930, you get 1895. If you subtract Sara's age, 37, from 1930, you get 1893. Ebenezer would have been born around 1895, and Sara would have been born around 1893. Remember, however, that these are only estimates. You still do not have their exact birth dates.

Can you trust your father's memory? He was right about some of the facts he gave you. However, he did not know Sara's middle name, and he was off four days on his father's birthday. Also, you have not uncovered anything so far that proved your great-grandpa was famous. Family stories are always a good place to start, but they are not always completely correct. They usually have some truth in them, but they can get changed or exaggerated over the years, so it is always a good idea to dig a little deeper.

When evaluating information, use the facts and data you already have and compare them with the new evidence. Then decide whether they fit together well with the rest of your information. Do this continually as you look at more sources of information to be sure the genealogical information you gather is accurate.

Spelling

When evaluating records, do not write off a record simply because the surname you are researching is not spelled the way you are used to seeing it spelled. Surnames have not always been spelled consistently. In earlier times, not everyone had the privilege of learning to read and write. The person writing down the name spelled it the way it sounded. In addition, many countries do not use the Roman alphabet we use in the United States. Russian, Indian, Chinese, Korean, and many other names must be transliterated into the Roman alphabet. Often a name can be transliterated in several different ways, which means the spelling of the name will not always be the same. The table provided shows some different spellings for a selection of names.

Surname	Different spellings
Borukhin	Brukhin, Bryukhin, Brokhin
Bouverie	Boverie, Bovary, Bouvry
Gines	Gynes, Gimes, Joines, Jeynes
Hofmeister	Hovemester, Havemeister, Hommester
Kapoor	Kapur
Mendes	Menendez, Menendes, Méndez, Méndes
Nichols	Nickles, Nickel, Nicole
Siebert	Segebrecht, Zieprecht, Sibbert
Walters	Walter, Waters, Wallers
Zhao	Chao, Chew, Chieu, Chu

Nicknames are another thing to check. You might have trouble finding an ancestor because you know only the person's nickname and not the full name, or vice versa. The table here shows some first names and the nicknames for them. Would you have guessed some of them? Your ancestor's name might also be abbreviated to the initials of his or her first and middle name.

First name	Nickname
Ann or Agnes	Nancy
Aaron	Ron
Bridget	Delia
Eduardo	Lalo
Ivan	Vanya
John	Jack
José	Pepe
Margaret	Peggy
Mary or Martha	Polly

Names of places are often spelled in different ways, too. The key to finding your ancestors is to have an open mind!

Keeping Track of Information

You should keep track of where you find your information so that other people will be able to find it if they need to. Plus, documenting your sources shows other people that they can trust your work.

There are two ways to keep track of your steps. One way is to write down your sources on your family group record or some other place that makes sense to you. Another possibility is to keep a *research log.*

There is no wrong or right way to document your sources. The important part is to write them down somewhere so that you or someone else can find the information again. Using a research log will help you stay organized with record keeping.

Write down information such as the name of the ancestor you are researching and in what place the person lived. The goal is just to help you remember what you are trying to learn about this ancestor.

If the source you are looking at is at a library or archive, put the call number here. If your source is a home source, write down the name and address or telephone number of the relative with the information. If the source is from the internet, write down the name and address of the website.

Research Log

Ancestor's name

Objectives

Locality

Date of search	Location/ call number	Description of source (author, title, year, pages)	Comments (purpose of search, results, years, and names searched)	Document number

Put down the day you did the research or found the information.

Write the title and a brief description of the record you are looking at. For example, "My grandfather's birth certificate" or "1920 U.S. Census, Marshall County, Mississippi."

Record what you found (or did not find), for example, "I found grandpa's birth certificate in the attic." Even if you do not find information where you expect to find it, you should document where you looked, for example, "I did not find grandpa's family on the 1920 U.S. Census, Marshall County, Mississippi." Doing this will help you know where your family is *not.*

Genealogy as a Profession

Professional genealogists do genealogical research to make their living. Some work for businesses that specialize in genealogical research. The genealogists do the actual research, but the company does all the communicating with clients, reporting, handling of finances, taxes, and other business matters. Some professional genealogists have their own businesses. They do the research and handle the business aspects.

Anyone can call himself or herself a professional genealogist. It is the responsibility of the person hiring a genealogist to determine if he or she is qualified. The Board for Certification of Genealogists and the International Commission for the Accreditation of Professional Genealogists test professional genealogists to ensure they are qualified to do good genealogical research in the area or areas of their specialty. These programs test the genealogist in both knowledge of sources and in actual research skills. These organizations can provide a list of genealogists who have been certified or accredited.

Board for Certification of Genealogists
P.O. Box 14291
Washington, DC 20044
www.bcgcertification.org

**International Commission for the Accreditation
of Professional Genealogists**
P.O. Box 4464
Salt Lake City, UT 84110
Toll-free telephone: 866-813-6729
www.icapgen.org

Qualified genealogical researchers almost always specialize in a particular geographical area. This is because the record sources for each area are different and records are constantly changing. It is not possible for one single person to keep current in all geographical areas, although knowledge of basic research procedures is the same in any locality.

If you ever decide to hire a professional genealogist, your local genealogical society can usually provide you with a list of genealogical researchers in your area and help you find out if he or she is accredited by one of the above organizations.

Recording and Organizing Information

The Pedigree Chart

To begin, you need a blank *pedigree chart* form to organize the information you gather about your ancestors. When making a pedigree chart, you start with yourself and then include information about your parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and so on, for the *direct line* of your family. You are a *descendant* of all the people listed on your pedigree chart. You probably will not have all the information at first, so just write in what you do know and leave the other spaces blank.

Pedigree chart

4. His Father
When Born:
Where:
Married:
Where:
Died:
Where:

2. My Father
When Born:
Where:
Married:
Where:
Died:
Where:

5. His Mother
When Born:
Where:
Married:
Where:
Died:
Where:

1. Me
When Born:
Where:
Married:
Where:
Died:
Where:

My Spouse

6. Her Father
When Born:
Where:
Married:
Where:
Died:
Where:

3. My Mother
When Born:
Where:
Married:
Where:
Died:
Where:

7. Her Mother
When Born:
Where:
Married:
Where:
Died:
Where:

1. Me

When Born:

Where:

Married:

Where:

Died:

Where:

My Spouse

Step 1—Fill in your information. You are No. 1 on your pedigree chart. Write your complete name, then your birth date with the day first, then the month, and then the year. Always give four digits for the year. Example: 14 May 1994. Then write the place you were born. Write place names from smallest to largest like this: Chicago, Cook, Illinois, United States. Chicago is the city, Cook is the county, Illinois is the state, and United States is the country. For foreign countries, use the same idea—that is, listing the places from smallest to largest. There probably will be some information on your pedigree chart that you will not be able to fill in yet, such as your marriage information!

Here are some more examples of how to write place names, going from smallest to largest. Later on you will see why it is important to include so much detail.

| Drakemuir, (village) | → | Dalry, (parish) | → | Ayrshire, (county or shire) | → | Scotland (country) |

| Ghatol, (town) | → | Banswara, (district) | → | Rajasthan, (state) | → | India (country) |

| Newport, (town) | → | Hants, (county) | → | Nova Scotia, (province) | → | Canada (country) |

| Acapantzingo, (town) | → | Cuernavaca, (county) | → | Morelos, (state) | → | Mexico (country) |

2. My Father

When Born:

Where:

Married:

Where:

Died:

Where:

Step 2—Fill in your father's information in the No. 2 position on the chart. If you do not know some of his information, such as his place of birth or your parents' marriage date, ask!

3. My Mother

When Born:

Where:

Married:

Where:

Died:

Where:

Step 3—Fill in your mother's information in the No. 3 position on the chart. Use her *maiden name,* which is the *surname* (last name) she had when she was born. In genealogy, always use a married woman's maiden name if you know it.

Step 4—Fill in information for other ancestors. Now that you understand how to record information on your pedigree chart, you can find information about the names, dates, and places for your grandparents and, if possible, great-grandparents.

Remember, it is fine to leave a blank space for any information you do not yet have. Some blank spaces for your more distant ancestors may never be filled in because there may be no records or the records may not be available to you.

Some people make their pedigree charts with computers. To do genealogy on a computer, you need genealogy software. See the Developments in Genealogy chapter and the resources section for more information on genealogy software programs.

Pedigree Chart

Steven Bruce Pajowski
1. Me
When Born: 14 May 1994
Where: Chicago, Cook, Illinois, United States
Married:
Where:

_____

My Spouse

Bruce Elliott Pajowski
2. My Father
When Born: 16 December 1959
Where: Chicago, Cook, Illinois, United States
Married: 8 October 1988
Where: Tinley Park, Cook, Illinois, United States
Died:
Where:

Jennifer Jane Matsumoto
3. My Mother
When Born: 30 September 1966
Where: Evanston, Cook, Illinois, United States
Married: 8 October 1988
Where: Tinley Park, Cook, Illinois, United States
Died:
Where:

John Charles Pajowski
4. His Father
When Born: 2 May 1929
Where: Newark, Essex, New Jersey, United States
Married: 1 June 1956
Where: Newark, Essex, New Jersey, United States
Died: 10 August 1991
Where: Tinley Park, Cook, Illinois, United States

Alice Margaret Elliott
5. His Mother
When Born: 19 December 1937
Where: Davenport, Scott, Iowa, United States
Married: 1 June 1956
Where: Newark, Essex, New Jersey, United States
Died:
Where:

Hiroshi Matsumoto
6. Her Father
When Born: 4 February 1927
Where: Wakayama-Ken, Japan
Married: 17 July 1959
Where: Seattle, King, Washington, United States
Died: 29 January 2002
Where: Evanston, Cook, Illinois, United States

Noriko Takahashi
7. Her mother
When Born: 18 August 1939
Where: San Francisco, San Francisco, California, United States
Married: 17 July 1959
Where: Seattle, King, Washington, United States
Died:

Adding small photographs to your pedigree chart can make it more interesting. You can buy charts with spaces built in for photos, or you can design your own. Place a photo of each ancestor near his or her space on the chart; do not worry if you don't have a photo of each one.

The Family Group Record Form

Your pedigree chart contains information about your parents, grandparents, and other direct ancestors. But what about other relatives such as brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, and cousins? They, too, are an important part of your genealogy.

The form used to record information about them is called a *family group record* form. One form usually lists information for one family unit, that is, the father (husband), the mother (wife), and all their children (listed in order of birth with the oldest child first).

Slightly different formats are available, but they all show the same basic information. To begin, first get a blank family group record form. You may want to photocopy the one provided here.

Put your father's information here.   **Put your mother's information here.**

Family Group Record   Page ____ of ____

Husband's Name		Other marriages ☐ See notes
Born	Place	
Other information		
Died	Place	
Married	Place	
Husband's father Name		
Husband's mother Name		
Wife's Name		Other marriages ☐ See notes
Born	Place	
Other information		
Died	Place	
Wife's father Name		
Wife's mother Name		

Children (List them whether living or dead.)

1	Name		Other marriages ☐ See notes
Female ☐	Born	Place	
	Other information		
	Died	Place	
Male ☐	Spouse's name		
	Married	Place	
2	Name		Other marriages ☐ See notes
Female ☐	Born	Place	
	Other information		
	Died	Place	
Male ☐	Spouse's name		
	Married	Place	

List your brothers and sisters and yourself in the places for children. The oldest should be listed first and the youngest listed last.

Husband's Name	Wife's Maiden name
Children (List them whether living or dead.)	

3	Name		Other marriages ☐ See notes
Female ☐	Born	Place	
	Other information		
	Died	Place	
Male ☐	Spouse's name		
	Married	Place	

Notes, explanations, and sources of information

Write down where you found your information. Examples of what you might write include the following.

"Family information from interview with my mother"

"My grandparents' marriage certificate, in the possession of my Uncle David, 1438 Viewmont Drive, Normal, Illinois"

"A story my grandpa told me"

"An old newspaper clipping from the Medford News, Medford, Oregon, 19 June 1945"

Things to do

This is a place to list ideas about where to look next for more information. Some examples are:

"I'm going to write a letter to my great-aunt to ask if she has some more family information."

"I'm going to look for my grandpa's obituary in old newspapers from the town where he died."

"I'm going to look at old census records for my great-grandma and her family to find out what her father did for a living."

All Families Are Special

There are many different types of families. For example, you may live in a home with the father and mother to whom you were born. Or you may live in a home with one parent, with two parents where one is a stepparent, or with other relatives. Your family may include half brothers and half sisters or stepbrothers and stepsisters. Each of these persons is an important member of your family.

On your pedigree chart it does not matter if the people you list as your family are biological (bloodline), adopted, step, foster, or other relationships. If you feel they are your family, list them on your forms.

Sometimes, however, there is a need to know the biological ancestry of a person, often for medical purposes. For this reason, it may be a good idea to place a note on the back of your genealogy forms that indicates when a relationship is other than bloodline.

If you have questions about what name should be placed in any position on your pedigree chart and family group record forms, ask your parent or guardian and your merit badge counselor. There is no right or wrong way to do it. It is a matter of individual choice.

Obtaining Genealogical Forms

You can get pedigree charts, family group record forms, and other genealogical forms from many suppliers. Where you choose to get them will depend on your own personal preferences.

If you have access to a personal computer with genealogy software that prints pedigree charts and family group record forms, you can print some out. If you have access to the internet, blank forms can be printed for free from many websites. Just search the web—with your parent or guardian's permission.

You also can get blank charts and forms from a genealogical supply store or a *genealogical society.*

You can obtain pedigree charts in an 8$\frac{1}{2}$-by-11-inch letter-size format, a legal-size format, or a large foldout size.

The Family History Library in Salt Lake City, Utah, is the world's largest library devoted to genealogy. It is free to the public.

Developments in Genealogy

Years ago, family historians had to travel to the place where the records they wanted were located. They had to copy down by hand any information they wanted to keep. This meant that people who wanted to do genealogy had to have the time and money to travel.

By the middle of the 20th century, however, microfilm had come into use. Microfilm is film of a paper document, such as a newspaper, photographed at a reduced size. The words and pictures on microfilm can be viewed with a microfilm reader, which magnifies them to their original size or larger.

Microfilm copies of original records from various places can be sent all over the world. People no longer have to travel so far to view a record. The records travel to them! Records may be viewed at a nearby genealogical library. The internet has made accessing records even more convenient. With internet access, it is possible to view many records on a personal computer in your home or school.

Microfilm and Microfiche

Micrographics is the branch of photography that captures images of records at a size much smaller than the original for storage and later use. Microfilm and microfiche are the two formats most commonly used in micrographics.

A microfilm camera reduces the size of the original image to a size that can fit on the film. Microfilm cameras may take pictures that range from a few times smaller than the original to many hundreds of times smaller than the original. Here is an image of a Scout and the same image approximately 10 times smaller than the original. You could fit 10 images of the Scout into the space where you originally only had one. You can see why microfilm is a great way to store records—it takes up much less space than the original records.

Advantages of microfilm include the following:

- There is less wear and tear on the original record.

- Microfilm can be duplicated into multiple copies so that people in many different places can have access to the record. In other words, microfilm makes wide distribution of the record possible.

- Microfilm serves as an archival, or preservation, copy of the record. If something were ever to happen to the original record, the microfilm is a backup.

- Microfilm provides an exact image of the original record, which prevents the possibility of mistakes creeping in when a record is copied by hand.

- Microfilm takes up much less storage space than the original documents.

Microfiche is another format for reduction photography. Microfiche is a clear, flexible card usually measuring approximately 6 inches by 4 inches and is about the same thickness as microfilm. It is possible to fit an entire book, even a large one, on a single microfiche.

Microfilm usually comes in either 16 mm or 35 mm widths.
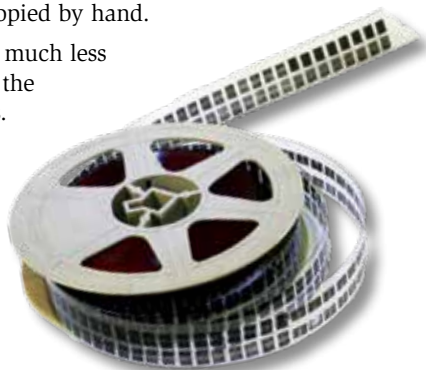
Digital Imaging

During the late 20th century, micrographics was cutting-edge technology for the preservation and distribution of original records. In the 21st century, however, digital imaging is the tool of choice.

A *digital image* is a picture of something, such as an original census record, that is stored electronically. A digital camera is used to take the picture. The camera converts images into a digital code that can then be read by a computer. The code associated with one image, usually called a file, must be stored somewhere so that it can be seen, or retrieved, later when someone needs it.

Data on the earliest computers were stored on paper cards that had the code punched into them. Next, files were stored on magnetic tape, then on magnetic disks (called floppy disks because the first ones were actually flexible). Today, files are stored on digital versatile discs (DVDs) or the hard drive (disk) of a computer or other device. Digital cameras have their own tiny hard disk on which image files are stored until they can be transferred, or downloaded, to a computer and then saved on to a longer-term storage device, such as a CD.

Anywhere from 600 to 800 black-and-white images can be stored on one CD. About 1,100 to 1,500 black-and-white images can be stored on one DVD.

One advantage of keeping images in a digital format is that it is easy and inexpensive to make copies. Another strength of the digital format is that the quality of each copy is as good as the original. However, if you do not have access to a computer or your computer does not have the software to read the files, digital records are of no use to you. In addition, computer technology changes rapidly, so data must constantly be transferred from outdated storage formats to current ones.

Computers and Indexes

The enormous storage capacities mentioned above and the pro-cessing capabilities of modern computers have made possible not only digital imaging but also digital indexing and searching. Suppose you were doing your research 50 years ago. What if you did not find information about your ancestor in the place where he or she lived? You would then have to search in all the places near where your ancestor lived. At the least this would have meant looking through many microfilms. But it also could have meant having to send for, travel to, or hire someone to search the records at another location. Now, many records have been put into databases and indexed so you can enter what you are searching for and let the computer do some of the hunting for you.

The Internet

The internet increases the number of people who can access a database. Instead of people having to get their own copy of a database, many people can use the same database at once.

When you go to a website for a genealogical record database, all you need to do is type in your search request. Your computer sends your request over the internet to the server, or mainframe computer where the database is stored. The server then sends the information requested back to your computer.

Remember that you should always ask for your parent or guardian's permission before surfing the web.

Genealogical research today

The database located at www.familysearch.org is an example of a large database that comes from two sources: user contributions and indexes of original records.

Genealogical Databases on the Internet

Once you have decided which ancestor you are going to research, try one or more of the following internet *databases:*

1. User-contributed (meaning the information is from individual people)

2. Index of an original source

3. Images of an original source (sometimes with an index)

The difference between the three is the source of the information. Remember that before you accept information as fact, you must decide whether it is correct and whether it is about *your* ancestor. Take a moment to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each type of database. Understanding the limitations of a database helps you determine the reliability of the information it offers.

User-contributed databases allow you to take advantage of the genealogy that other people have already traced. You might be able to get in touch with distant relatives who also are working on your genealogy. The drawback is that the person may not have done his or her research very carefully and it may contain mistakes.

Indexes of an original record provide you with an easy-to-search index of records from a documented source. These indexes are based on original records and not someone's opinion. However, the fact that a person had to enter the information into a computer in the first place also means that typos and other mistakes are likely. Often you will have to pay a fee to use these databases.

Images of an original record may or may not be indexed. If they are indexed, they offer one of the easiest ways to access information about an ancestor. You can look for your ancestor and then immediately view the original source to make sure the information is correct. If the images are not indexed on the computer (they may be indexed somewhere else), you can still look at the original record instead of having to find a copy of it. Many times these databases cost money to use.

> Before April 1999, the International Genealogical Index was available only at about 4,000 Family History Centers and a few libraries that had copies of it. When it was placed on the internet, it became available to millions of people. The IGI is just one example of many online genealogical databases.

Other Genealogical Resources on the Internet

In addition to internet databases, there are many other types of websites that can help you with your family history. For instance, sites devoted to different countries and regions can help you learn about the history, traditions, or customs of a particular place. Many people working on their family histories have put up websites where they post information about the genealogical work they have completed so far. These sites can be quite helpful if you find one that has information about an ancestor you and the other person have in common. There also are websites of archives and libraries that give information about original records. Some of these websites are free, while others require that you pay a fee to use them.

Local family history and historical societies can be excellent sources of valuable genealogical information. Most societies have websites that provide at the least a mailing address where you can write for information. Some have sites that offer complete online indexes of records. Many of these societies

have indexes and records that you can purchase if you cannot find the records elsewhere.

> Societies focused on tracing certain ethnic groups are very similar to local family history societies. They specialize in finding records about one particular group and therefore can give you help that you might not find anywhere else.

Large archives and libraries almost always have websites. Sometimes they have online indexes. Usually, these websites will give you at least an idea, if not an actual catalog, of the records the archive or library holds. They will also tell you how you can access their records. You may be able to visit and view their records in person, or they may have a search service that will do the search for you for a fee. They might provide information about professional researchers you can hire.

Menu sites, such as www.cyndislist.com, help you find other websites. They are usually organized by place and then subject. For instance, if you were looking for a local genealogical society that covered Washtenaw County in Michigan you would:

- Go to www.cyndislist.com.

- Click on Categories, scroll down to United States, then click on Michigan.

- Click Counties and then click Washtenaw.

- In the list that appears, click on Societies & Groups.

A list of links to websites about Washtenaw County would appear. Among these websites you would see a link for the Genealogical Society of Washtenaw County. You can follow these steps for any state and county in the United States, or for other countries.

Menu sites are helpful for identifying websites that can assist you in tracing ancestors belonging to a particular ethnic group or nationality. If you were looking for resources related to Jewish genealogy, for example, you could go to www.cyndislist.com, click on Category, and then scroll down the list of places and topics until you get to the heading "Jewish." Click on that heading and then select the topic that interests you from the index listing; you will find links to many

Using Search Engines

Search engines typically use keywords. Keywords are words that are unique to what you are searching for. For example, take a look at the following sentence, "I am looking for the grave of my ancestor Rose Goldman." You would likely pick the words *grave* and *Rose Goldman* because the other words are very common and can be used in many other contexts.

If you just typed in *grave* and *Rose Goldman,* you would get thousands of hits. You would need to narrow your search. To do this, you might add the name of the place Rose Goldman died or the year of her death to your search terms. Remember, however, that not all the Rose Goldmans you find will be your ancestor. In fact, it is possible that none of the matches you get will be your ancestor.

Remember, too, that computers are not as smart as you are. For instance, suppose you are looking for your ancestor named Marco Angelo Benedetto. You type his name into the search engine, and it does not find him. However, if you were looking at the original record, you would find him as M.A. Benedetto. You would know this is probably him, but the computer was looking for an exact match. This same idea applies to any type of search on a computer, not just a keyword search.

websites for Jewish genealogy. If your particular ancestry is not listed by name, click on the name of the country your family came from. For example, click on the heading, "Italy/Italia" to find information on Italian genealogy.

Search engines are a great way to search the internet. Bear in mind, however, that they are much more helpful if you are looking for places or things rather than individual ancestors. For example, if you were looking for the National Genealogical Society's website, you would type *National Genealogical Society* into the search engine. Their site should be among the first few hits.

Genealogy Software Programs

Personal computers are a great help when organizing your genealogical research. You can type your information into a genealogy software program instead of filling out forms by hand. Then you can print out any charts or forms you might need. The best part is that if you make a mistake, it is easy to correct. Another nice

thing about genealogy computer programs is that you can easily make copies of your work for other people.

These programs can do a variety of things. Not only can you enter names, dates, and places, but you can keep track of your information sources. If you have photos of your family, you can scan them and position them next to the information for that person. Some programs allow you to keep research logs as well. Some basic programs are free, while others must be purchased. See the resources section for information about a few of these programs.

Founded in 1903, the National Genealogical Society serves as a center for genealogical activities and interest at the national level. Members of the society are both amateur family history researchers and professional genealogists. The NGS publishes *NGS Quarterly,* featuring genealogical writing, previously unpublished source materials, and reviews of new books in the field of genealogy. *NGS Monthly* features information about the society's activities and programs.

Genealogy Apps for Phones and Tablets

The world of genealogy has benefited from the invention of smartphones and tablets.

Today's phones consist of many powerful tools rolled into one small device—a still camera, a video camera, a voice recorder, interactive maps, language translators, and a pocket document scanner.

There are many genealogy apps available for your device. These allow you to access and download billions of records from around the world as well as easily organize your family tree in colorful formats. Some apps are free; others require a paid subscription. Paid services frequently include access to unique databases of historical records not available elsewhere.

Additionally, you can find some powerful genealogy apps that are well suited to particular countries, regions, and cultures. Those would include access to local historical records and a community of local experts proficient in that territory.

A key feature of many genealogy apps is the ability to collect and share important family "memories" such as photos, historical documents, stories, and audio clips.

Scouts should consult with their parent, guardian, merit badge counselor, or local family history center for guidance to determine which apps, if any, would be best for their circumstance.

DNA and Ancestry Research

Another area of new advances is that of genetic genealogy and the field of DNA biosciences. A simple DNA test can reveal much about your family tree such as ethnic makeup, unique genetic traits, and family medical risks. DNA testing has proven valuable in finding lost family members. As of 2019, about 30 million people had been tested.

Some genealogy DNA testing companies can find relative matches back through 15 generations of family connections, including paid services such as AncestryDNA and 23andMe.com.

Genealogy as a Crime-Fighting Tool

Some of today's genealogists are active crime fighters. Investigative genetic genealogy, also called forensic genealogy, uses genetic information to identify suspects or victims in criminal cases. By September 2021, the use of this practice had led to the discovery of over 150 suspects of murder and violent assault. This field uses publicly accessible genealogy databases.

A key element of this forensic genealogical research is to identify shared ancestors. Data available in GEDMatch, which is composed of genetic profiles from approximately 1.2 million individuals, has proven capable of identifying a third cousin or closer in over 90% of the population. This information, used in tandem with demographic identifiers like age, gender, and place of residence, can positively identify a criminal suspect or victim.

Law enforcement agencies use public databases to upload crime-scene genetic data and then find people who are related to potential suspects. Genealogy experts then create a family tree and look for other identifiers to zero in on a single person.

Record Indexing

Indexing is a crowdsourcing volunteer effort that adds millions of new names and historical records into searchable online databases. Many old records are handwritten or hard to read. Humans are much better than machines at interpreting those old records. Through crowdsourcing, volunteers use their home computers to compare images of the old records with the typed index in the online database and make any corrections. This ensures that the information in the searchable index is accurate.

Today there is a huge need for help and young people your age around the world are leading the response to this challenge.

There are many programs and tutorials to teach volunteers and to minimize mistakes. A number of beginner tutorial videos with screen-sharing demos can be easily found on YouTube.

The biggest leader in this field is FamilySearch.org, which started the first large crowdsource indexing project in 2006 by successfully transcribing the 1880 United States Census. Youth as young as age 13 can participate.

There are usually hundreds of active indexing projects available for anyone to join. The next great project in the United States opened in April 2022, when the 1950 U.S. Census was released to the public.

Join a Crowdsource Indexing Project

There are many projects open to volunteers age 13 and above. Each project includes an easy tutorial on how to get started, and YouTube has many easy-to-follow videos on youth projects for name indexing. Your merit badge counselor could also help you get started on a project that he/she is involved with **Some volunteer opportunities include:**

- A genealogy museum or family history center near you might need help on special local historical projects.
- Volunteer at FamilySearch: www.familysearch.org/en/info/volunteer
- How to help on FindAGrave: news.findagrave.com/2019/07/30/photo-volunteers-and-photo-request/
- Comprehensive list of opportunities: conferencekeeper.org/volunteer/
- Another list of volunteer opportunities: ancestralfindings.com/do-good-genealogy-9-exciting-volunteer-opportunities/

　—Note: All links active as of mid-2023

Another popular branch of genealogical record indexing is the vast effort to photograph and document gravestones around the world. A number of Eagle Scout candidates have included this type of work as an important part of their required service project when seeking to restore a historic site such as a battlefield or cemetery. Two major organizations in this field are FindAGrave.com and BillionGraves.com. An important element here is to record the GPS coordinates for each grave, an important skill you might have already learned about when working on the Geocaching merit badge.

Some genealogists contact users of both BillionGraves.com and FindAGrave.com for crowdsourcing a larger team to search for a hard-to-find ancestor's gravestone.

Glossary

ancestor. A person from whom you are descended, for example, your parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents.

database. A collection of records taken from one or more sources and compiled on a computer.

descendant. Person descended from an ancestor (son, daughter, grandson, granddaughter).

digital image. A picture that was taken by a digital camera and is stored electronically.

direct line. Parents and the parents of parents.

event. A birth, marriage, death, religious ceremony, burial, or something that happens in the life of a family member that is important enough to record.

family group record. A form that has spaces for organizing information about members of a family. The parents are recorded at the top of the form, then their children below them. Events such as births, marriages, and deaths; the dates of the events; and the places where they happened are recorded.

genealogical society. An organization of people with a common interest in the family history either of a particular surname, a religious or ethnic group, or a geographical area. Examples include the Watkins Family Organization, the Catholic Family History Society of England, the French-Canadian Genealogical Society of Connecticut, and the Albuquerque Genealogical Society.

genealogy. The study of one's ancestors—parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and so on back through history.

generation. Each step back in parents is a generation. You and your brothers and sisters are a generation. Your parents are another generation. Your grandparents are another generation, and so on.

head of the household. An adult in a house who is responsible for the others in the house. Historically, fathers were often listed as head of the household.

index. A shortcut to using a record. In genealogy, indexes are usually arranged alphabetically by the names of people in the records, but they may also list place names or other things.

maiden name. A married woman's surname before she got married.

micrographics. The branch of photography in which documents are photographed, reduced, and transferred to microfilm or microfiche.

oral history. The passing down by word of mouth from one generation to another of stories and events in a family's history.

original records. Records created at or near the time that an event occurred. Some examples in genealogy are vital records, religious institution records, and census records.

pedigree chart. A form that shows several generations of parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, etc. It is also often called a family tree or ancestor chart.

research log. A place where a researcher records the genealogy research he or she has done. A research log helps avoid unnecessary duplication of research.

source. A person, book, record, document, tombstone, or other place where information was obtained.

statewide index. An index that arranges all the names within the state into one alphabetical list, usually by surname. A countywide index would do the same thing for a county. A nationwide or national index would do the same thing for an entire country.

surname. A person's last name or family name.

transcription. A handwritten, printed, or typewritten copy of something. A transcription requires that someone read, interpret, and then rerecord the information in the record. A photocopy, microfilm, or digital image of a record is not a transcription.

vital record. A record recording firsthand information about a birth, marriage, or death.

Genealogy Resources

Scouting Literature

American Heritage merit badge pamphlet

With your parent or guardian's permission, visit Scouting America's official retail site, **scoutshop.org**, for a complete list of merit badge pamphlets and other helpful Scouting materials and supplies.

Books

Beidler, James M., *The Family Tree German Genealogy Guide: How to Trace Your Germanic Ancestry in Europe.* Family Tree Books, 2014.

Bettinger, Blaine T. *The Family Tree Guide to DNA Testing and Genetic Genealogy*. Family Tree Books, 2019.

Burroughs, Tony. B*lack Roots: A Beginner's Guide to Tracing the African American Family Tree.* Simon & Schuster, 2001.

Combs-Bennett, Shannon. *Genealogy Basics In 30 Minutes: The quick guide to creating a family tree, building connections with relatives, and discovering the stories of your ancestors.* I30 Media Corporation, 2021.

Fryxell, David A., *The Family Tree Scandinavian Genealogy Guide: How to Trace Your Family Tree in Denmark, Sweden and Norway.* Family Tree Books, 2019.

Garza, Moises. *Mexican Genealogy Research Online: A Guide to Help You Discover Your Ancestry.* CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014.

Hendrickson, Nancy. *Finding Your Roots Online.* Betterway Books, 2003.

Holtz, Melanie, *The Family Tree Italian Genealogy Guide: How to Trace Your Family Tree in Italy.* Family Tree Books, 2017.

Kavasch, E. Barry. *A Student's Guide to Native American Genealogy.* Oryx Press, 1996.

Kemp, Thomas Jay. International *Vital Records Handbook, 7th ed.* Genealogical Publishing, 2017

Mills, Elizabeth Shown. *Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace.* Genealogical Publishing Company, 2009.

Renick, Barbara. *Genealogy 101: How to Trace Your Family's History and Heritage.* Rutledge Hill Press, 2003.

Schleifer, Jay. *A Student's Guide to Jewish American Genealogy.* Oryx Press, 1996.

She, Colleen. *A Student's Guide to Chinese American Genealogy.* Oryx Press, 1996.

Yamaguchi, Yoji. *A Student's Guide to* Japanese *American Genealogy.* Oryx Press, 1996.

Genealogical Websites and Organizations

AfriGeneas
www.afrigeneas.org

American Ancestors
www.americanancestors.org

Ancestry
www.ancestry.com

Cyndi's List
www.cyndislist.com

FamilyPedia
familypedia.wikia.org

FamilySearch
www.familysearch.org

Genealogy.com
www.genealogy.com

The Library of Congress
www.loc.gov

National Archives
www.archives.gov

National Genealogical Society
www.ngsgenealogy.org

The Newberry
www.newberry.org

Relative Finder
www.relativefinder.org

SBIE Genealogy Group
www.facebook.com/groups/519662364758373

USGenWeb Project
www.usgenweb.org

WorldGenWeb Project
www.worldgenweb.org

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National Archives and Records Administration; Navajo code talkers, photograph No. 127-GR-137-57875; July 7, 1943—page 62

Town of Newton, Mass.—page 20

Wikipedia.org—page 46

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Once you start interviewing your relatives, you may learn they played an important role in history. For example, during World War II, these Navajo Marines transmitted top-secret radio messages in a military code based on the complex Navajo language. The code could not be cracked by the enemy and was crucial in a number of Allied victories during the war.

Discovering your ancestors' history will open doors to your own past.