

Getting Started

Genealogy: (n) an account of the descent of a person, family, or group from an ancestor or from older forms or, more simply - one's family history

How to Start

- a) Begin at home. Collect pictures, letters, cards, newspaper clippings and funeral notices. Places at home to check are photo albums, trunks, drawers, family Bible, etc.
- b) Talk to relatives. Tape record or write notes from those conversations-preferably both. Note who said what and when, because there will be some contradictions. Always ask if the person knows anyone else in the family who is doing genealogical research. Sometimes there is a distant relative already doing research that you can tap into.
- c) Kinds of questions to ask to get people talking: Ask where they were born. Where did they live and when did they live there? Ask about marriages, jobs, clubs and organizations, church memberships, military service, hobbies, etc
- d) Talk to friends of your parents and grandparents. Often friends have heard stories or can share experiences that family members have never heard or are not willing to share.
- e) In seeking information from strangers, call them up first. Most people do not like strangers showing up at their front door asking questions. Jot down a few questions before you call so you have your thoughts together. Ask at the end of the conversation if you can call them back later, if necessary.
- f) In talking to people, ask not only for facts, but also for family tales, stories, etc.
- g) After you talk to someone, or receive information via mail, fax, etc., always acknowledge that you got the information and thank them, even if the information is not what you expected or can use. They have taken time to help you and a thank you shows your appreciation.

Once You Have Background Information, Go To The Library

- a) First check to see if the library has any books or papers about your family that have already been researched. Keep in mind even people with your last name may not be related and you always have to be suspicious of research done by other people, but it never hurts to see if there is already information compiled on your family. **Note:** You might like to check our family histories which are located in alphabetical order in the archival boxes on the window sill or at the call number 292.2. We also have an index of some five generation ancestral charts.
- b) Check census records. The federal government does a census every ten years. The most recent census records are kept confidential, but those from 1820 through 1930 are available on microfilm for Coshocton County. The kinds of information vary from decade to decade, but often list all the people living in a household, including relatives, boarders and servants. Information usually includes ages, addresses, relationship to others in household, jobs, etc.
- c) We have city directories, which list the head of the household, where they lived,

and occupation. We also have listings of who are buried in local cemeteries. Cemetery records will pinpoint the date a person died. People are also often buried in family plots, which means people buried near them are usually related, even if they have a different last name. Examples of this would be a daughter who is buried under her married name.

d) Other library sources include listings of veterans for various wars, e.g. U.S. Civil War Spanish American War, WWI & II, etc., as well as ship passenger lists, newspapers, etc. (The Coshocton Public Library has newspapers dating back to the

e) Check local historical and genealogical societies. Check the same kinds of sources as listed for libraries. Note: When doing research at libraries and societies, chat with people there. It is amazing how often others are either doing research that may be related, or they may know of someone else doing research on related families.

f) County courthouses will have deed records showing land purchases, marriage licenses, deeds, wills, and sometimes birth certificates. Those records are usually kept by the county clerk's office in the county courthouse.

Attend Family Reunions: Setting up displays with pictures and written material often helps to get people talking. This is also a good occasion to take photographs of family members, Using a digital camera, if available, is a good idea as many computerized genealogical programs have the ability to incorporate photographs.

Other places to make contact with relatives are weddings, funerals, and birthdays.

Closing Notes: Research is almost always best when done backwards. Start with your parents and work your way back. There is nothing more frustrating than spending hours upon hours researching an individual, only to discover you are not related to them.

Be careful in buying books that promise information on your family tree. Most often they are simply lists of people with your last name. The information on the family origin is often very generic, and sometimes simply made up.

When hiring a professional researcher, set the ground rules in advance as to how much they will charge. Also find out if there is an extra fee for copying or for their travel expenses. Also make it clear what you want. As an example, do you want copies of official records or can the researcher simply copy the information and send it to you? Setting ground rules will reduce later headaches.

Document Everything: Where you found it, when, page number, person's name, etc. Always assume you are going to have to go back to that source for more information (because you often will.) Approach the research as a fun hobby. No one becomes a good golfer or bowler the first time out. Family research is the same. Information usually comes in bits and pieces, but the search is 90% of the fun. Each "find" makes all the research worthwhile.

A Final Note: Be patient. Rarely is genealogical research able to be done quickly. Genealogy is a time-consuming, laborious process that ultimately proves very rewarding; and indeed, can have its "moment of enlightenment" along the way.