

Getting Started with your Family History



1. Start with what you know ...

The first place to start your search is with yourself. Gather what you already know about your family and talk with relatives to find out what they might know as well. Some of the most important pieces of information you'll want to know are names of your ancestors (including maiden names for women), dates and places of birth, marriage, and death, and information about where your ancestors lived.

2. Get organized ...

Your search will go much more smoothly if you organize your information. Pedigree and family group charts are great tools to help gather together what you already know about your family and to record additional information you find in your search. Starting a research calendar to record where you've searched and what you've found is another useful tool. You can find many printable charts and forms for free online. You can also download free family history software to help organize your information.

3. Decide what you want to learn ...

Once you've organized what you already know, select an ancestor you'd like to learn more about. Identify something you'd like to learn about them, such as where they were born, when they died, or who their parents were. Selecting one specific fact that you'd like to discover about a single ancestor or ancestral family will help focus your search.

4. Select records to search ...

Next, discover which type of records will help you find out what you'd like to know. There are many types of records available that have genealogical value, such as census records, birth, marriage, and death certificates, and newspapers. Ask a librarian at the Local History / Genealogy department of your library if you're not sure which records can help answer your specific research question.

5. Obtain and search records ...

After determining which types of records are relevant for your research question, you'll want to find and search the specific records that might contain information about your ancestor. Many records have been digitized and are accessible online. The vast majority of them, however, are housed in libraries, archives, courthouses, and other repositories throughout the world. You can utilize the internet or ask your local Family History / Genealogy librarian to help you access specific records.

6. Record what you find ...

Once you've searched a genealogical record, make note of what you've found. Copy useful information about your ancestor into your personal records and, if possible, make a photocopy or digital copy of the record for your personal use. If searching through a group of records yields no information about your specific ancestor, still take note of what was searched so you don't waste time re-examining the same records at a later date.

7. Repeat ...

Once you've found what you were looking for, select something new you want to learn and repeat the process. There's always something new about your family that's waiting out there for you to discover.

Provided by:
Local History / Genealogy Department
Onondaga County Public Library
www.onlib.org/web/lh