

Basic Guide to Beginning your Family History

1. Begin with yourself and work backwards in time. Begin with the known and work to the unknown. Write down names, dates and places of events, and any family stories that may assist in your research.
2. Look around your home for additional clues. Scrapbooks; photographs; journals; diaries; family histories; obituaries and memorial cards; birth, marriage, and death announcements or certificates; and old newspaper clippings may provide information.
3. Organize your information. Complete family group sheets and ancestor charts to assist with this step. Consider purchasing a genealogy software program if you are able. Software programs easily enable researchers to add, change, or delete information. Various reports may be printed, including narrative reports, descendant charts, ancestor charts, and family group sheets.
4. Contact living relatives to see if they have any additional information that may assist you in your search or help complete some of the missing information.
5. Begin researching the information you need. You may elect to use the Internet or contact historical and genealogical societies; courthouses, health department, or other government agencies; archives, libraries, or record centers; churches, cemeteries, or other places of interest that may provide clues to your family's history.
6. Document all your resources. You should provide enough detail so anyone who may look at your work could duplicate your findings with some ease.
7. Analyze your findings. Verify that the information makes sense. For example, women should be recorded as having children during child bearing ages; ages given at the time of death should be within the life expectancy limit; young men should be of age or near the appropriate age when serving in the military; etc.
8. Do not overlook the details found in records. Many times, the information found on one source may lead you to other resources. For example, census records often provide clues to military service, immigration, birth years and places, property ownership, multiple marriages, and possible deaths within the family.

A photograph of a dense, multi-column table, likely a census record, showing names, dates, and other details.