



## GETTING STARTED: GENEALOGY TIPS

### RICHARDSON-SLOANE SPECIAL COLLECTIONS CENTER

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Begin with yourself! Work from the known to the unknown. Don't skip generations. Start with a pedigree chart – it tracks one individual's direct ancestors by generations.

Next create family group sheets – it records families as groups. Start with:

    Yourself and your partner – any children

    Yourself as a child – with your parents and siblings

    Each parent – with their parents (your grandparents) and siblings

Examples of each are included in this packet along with a list of online sites offering free printable forms.

Now talk to relatives and family friends that might know facts about your family. Use their information to help fill in missing information on the record sheets. Some conversation starters might include:

- Where and when were you born? What was happening at the time of your birth? What was the name you were given at birth? Were you named after anyone?
- What are your parent's names? Maiden names? When and where born? How many siblings do you have?
- Do you recall when and where your grandparents died? Do you know where they are buried?
- How did your parents and grandparents earn a living? What was their religious affiliation?
- Do you know any stories about what their lives were like?
- Do you know the names of the first ancestors who came to America? Do you know why they left their homeland? Do you know the name of their homeland?

Take notes and record the date and place the conversations take place. Better yet, record the visit on video!

Next determine a research goal. Pick one person or branch of the family tree that intrigues you and determine what you would like to focus on.

Start digging into some records that are available in libraries, courthouses and online. A terrific place to begin is with census records as they are a great source for locating and tracing parents, siblings, and families across generations. Browse several pages before and after your family as relatives often lived nearby. Neighborhood clusters can also be helpful. Census records provide excellent clues about not only places and dates of birth, but can tell you in which counties you will want to search for wills, probate records, birth, marriage, death records, church and land records, and other documentation. The census isn't going to give you every piece of the puzzle, but it is an efficient way to get started. You can freely access census records at [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org) and here at the library using our online subscriptions to Ancestry Library Edition and Heritage Quest. Davenport Library card holders can also access Heritage Quest from home by logging in with their library card number.

- Be systematic in your approach to research and ALWAYS record where and when you found (or didn't find) the information. *Write it down!*
- Try variant spellings of names. Drop the "Mac" or "O". Try both "sen" and "son" or a wildcard search "s\*n". Remember first names were sometimes abbreviated (Geo. for George) or only initials were used.
- Less is often more when searching online. If you enter too much information or set an exact search you may have disappointing and limited results.
- Look at the original record not just the transcription. It usually has substantially more information than the abstract.
- Consult as many records as possible about an individual or family to assist in evaluating new information you find.
- Learn the geography and social setting of your subject. Looking at the bigger historical picture is essential in quality research.

- Now analyze. Evaluate the information. Who provided it? Does it confirm or contradict what you already know? Does the record provide direct evidence or are you inferring something from the information? Are sources cited?
- If you are satisfied the information is valid, then go ahead and add it to your family tree and move on to your next research goal.

The following three tables provide an overview of types of records, sources of information and the records most likely to have specific pieces of information you are seeking. With credit to author genealogist Ann Lawthers [www.americanancestors.org/education/learning-resources/read/getting-started](http://www.americanancestors.org/education/learning-resources/read/getting-started).

Table 1: Records with Genealogical Information

Type of Record	Description	Information in Record
Vital Records – Created by Governments	This includes the recording of births, marriages and death by towns or states. Not until the twentieth century in the U.S. did government record keeping of vital events become universal.	Name, date, place and sometimes parent’s names, including mother’s maiden name
Vital Records – Created by Religious Institutions	Records kept by religious institutions of parishioners, including marriage certificates, baptisms, confirmations, burials, birth records, Hebrew School attendance, and other materials.	Same as above, plus witnesses to the event
Vital Records – Created by Families	Bible records	Name and date and sometimes place
Census	US Census: Every ten years beginning in 1790. Until 1850, the census only listed the head of household and tabulated the ages of household members by age categories. From 1850 onward, the census became a much more useful source of genealogical information.  State Census: Some states conducted their own censuses in between federal census years.	Name, age, and gender of each family member, occupation, birthplace and other information, depending on year
Cemeteries	Tombstones vary in the amount of information captured. Online websites such as <a href="http://Findagrave.com">Findagrave.com</a> may include transcriptions of obituaries or biographical information in addition to a photo of the tombstone.	Name, date of birth, date of death. Sometimes the maiden name and the place of birth are included.
Immigration and Emigration Records	Records generated in tracking individuals arriving or departing a country. Includes ship passenger lists, border crossing records, and passport applications.	Few lists pre-1820. From 1820-1893 – just the name, age, gender and country of origin were recorded. Beginning in 1893 more extensive information such as last residence and marital status were captured. Passport applications typically include name, date and place of birth.
Naturalization and Citizenship Records	Records generated through the process of an individual applying for and becoming a citizen of a country. Beginning in 1790 the US naturalization process required two steps. After living in the U.S. for at least two years a person could file a declaration of intent to become a	Name, nationality, date and place of birth, port and date of arrival. After 1907, may find spouses name, date and place of birth as well as information about children.

	citizen, followed three years later by a petition for naturalization. The final certificate was issued based on the petition.	
Land and Property	Records generated by the purchase and sale of land, such as warrants, deeds and mortgages. In the colonial period, most rural heads of house owned land.	Name, name of wife, names of family members, names of neighbors. Some states, such as Maryland, gave parcels of land names such as "Peace," or "Dorsey's Folly," which makes tracing ownership across generations somewhat easier.
Probate	Records generated by the process of settling an estate after death. If a person made a will, they are said to have died "testate;" without a will, "intestate."	Wills mention relationships: husband, wife, children.
Taxation	Records generated to track receipt of taxes paid to government.	Name, property. In colonial periods, the presence of a name on a list signified the person was of legal age (16, 18 or 21 depending on the colony).
Military	Records generated as a result of an individual's involvement in the armed forces, including draft registration cards, service records, pension records, and bounty land records	Draft: Name, age, place of birth, occupation, residence. Service: Name, age, dates of service Pension: Name, date of birth, death, family members.
Newspapers	Birth, marriage and death notices are the principle uses of newspapers by genealogists although some ancestors generate news articles.	Names, dates of events, location, family members.

Table 2: Other Sources of Genealogical Information

Source	Description	Information
Compiled genealogies	Published family histories	Descendants, lineage. Some compiled genealogies have been carefully documented, others present data without source citations and must be treated as finding aids.
Local Histories	Histories of towns, counties, and states provide a wealth of useful information for genealogists. They describe the early settlement of an area and describe the founding of churches, schools, and businesses. Many histories include lists of pioneers, soldiers, and civil officials. Prominent citizens receive a biographical write-up.	Names, relationships, places, occupations. These histories may place your ancestor in an area before the ancestor left a record.
Biographies	Life histories of prominent people	Names, relationships, migration patterns, occupations, residences.

Table 3: Suggested Records by Information Needed.

Information Needed	Search These Records First	Then Search These Records
Age	Census, Vital Records, Cemeteries	Military Records, Taxation
Birth date and place	Vital Records	Cemeteries, Newspapers, Census
Country of foreign birth	Naturalization Records, Vital Records, Census	Military Records, Vital Records, Newspapers
Death date and place	Vital Records, Cemeteries, Probate Records, Newspapers	Newspapers, Bible Records, Military Records
Foreign birth location	Vital Records, Published Genealogies, Biographies, Naturalization, Immigration, Census	Vital Records, Newspapers, History, Emigration and Immigration
Immigration date	Census, Immigration, Naturalization	Newspapers, Biographies
Maiden name	Vital Records, Newspapers	Cemeteries, Military Records, Probate Records
Marriage date and place	Vital Records, Census, Newspapers	Cemeteries, Military Records, Probate Records, Naturalization, Land
Parents' names	Vital Records, Census, Probate Records, Newspapers, Published Genealogies	Emigration
Places family has lived	Census, Land, Local Histories, Directories	Military Records, Taxation, Obituaries

Online sites for free printables:

<https://blogs.davenportlibrary.com/sc/forms/>

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[https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Genealogy\\_Research\\_Forms](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Genealogy_Research_Forms)

FamilySearch Wiki for genealogy research forms with links to forms from:

National Archives  
 Family Tree magazine  
 Cyndi's List  
 FamilySearch

<https://www.mymcpl.org/genealogy/resources/family-history-forms>

Midwest Genealogy Center

