

The National Genealogical Society <<http://www.ngsgenealogy.org>> makes the following suggestions to family history beginners.

Suggestions for Beginners  
Climbing Your Family Tree  
National Genealogical Society

Have you ever climbed a tree and sat enjoying the view? Well, get ready to climb; only this tree - the view from it—will be the most fascinating you've ever seen. Your family will want to climb the tree someday, too, so it's important to carefully record your findings in a permanent place for everyone to enjoy long after you have become their ancestor.

Linking generations, setting each in its unique historical perspective, brings them to life again for everyone. Through you, your children will look into eyes that are very like their own.

Looking Around You . . .

Begin at home.

Personal knowledge can form the first limbs of your family tree. First, make a simple chart, beginning with you, your parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. Search for birth, marriage, and death certificates, and other documents that might provide names, dates, and locations. Then look at Bible records, old letters, photographs and family memorabilia.

Label everything you recognize. Now you are well on your way to forming the branches of your family tree - and it will begin to bud.

Contact family members to ask questions about their lives and those of other family members. Where did they live—what part of the country—what kind of dwelling? Did they move around while growing up? When were their relatives born; when did they die? Take along some of the old photos and attic treasures to jog their memories. And be sure to ask if you may see their old family records, letters, and memorabilia that might help you expand your search.

Listen to family stories and make notes. Family members often have different versions of the same story since each person remembers an event in his or her unique way, but these differences make it

interesting! Share what you already know with them. Use a tape recorder if your relative feels comfortable with it, and make your initial visits short with someone you are just getting to know.

### Recording Your Information . . .

After collecting family information, it is important to record it correctly on forms referred to as family group sheets and pedigree charts. Be sure to indicate a source for each fact and then file families in separate groups organized so that you can locate each individual in an ever-expanding collection. Include old photos (of people, homes, and cemetery markers) and record stories, both those you heard as a child and those your family members tell you.

To learn more, you may purchase the National Genealogical Society's Beginner's Kit that includes the booklet "Instructions for Beginners in Genealogy" and a small supply of pedigree charts and family group sheets. This kit will help you get started and develop good record-keeping habits. It is available from the National Genealogical Society (NGS) Education Department.

### Looking for Local Information . . .

Visit your local library to search for historical or genealogical publications. Read family and geographical histories of the areas where your relatives lived. These sources might mention surnames of interest to you. Remember that you may find family names spelled in different ways.

Purchase "how-to" books that will explain research techniques and sources. Look in the telephone directory for a genealogical society in your area. Such societies often sponsor genealogical lectures and seminars, and joining one can expand your opportunities to meet other researchers and begin to network. Then consider taking classes at your local college or adult education facility.

Visit your local courthouse to discover a repository of wills, deeds, and marriage records. Inquire about how these documents are recorded, arranged, and indexed.

### Broadening Your Research . . .

Visit county courthouses and genealogical libraries in areas where your ancestors lived. While there, check area newspapers for obituaries,

always a rich source of details, and visit local churches to review christening, birth, marriage, and death records.

Locate names and addresses of state libraries or archives that might have state census records, war records, etc., which might provide additional family information. Then plan to write or visit these repositories to learn more about their holdings and services.

The National Archives in Washington, D.C., maintains 1790-1920 census records, military, pension, passenger and ship arrivals, and many more record sources. In addition to the Archives in Washington, the United States has twelve regional archives.

The Genealogical Society of Utah has microfilmed vital, land, probate, tax and military records, state and federal censuses, family and local histories, special collections, and numerous sources since the 1930s. Their vast holdings are found at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, and there are more than 2,000 family history centers worldwide. For additional information on accessing these collections, please write to:

Family History Library  
35 North West Temple Street  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84150-0001

Continuing to Learn . . .

To continue your learning experience beyond that of a beginner, you may want to enroll in the National Genealogical Society's home study program, "American Genealogy: A Basic Course." This widely acclaimed course, which enables you to study at home at your own pace, includes instructions and assignments. You return the completed lessons to NGS for grading and comments by experienced genealogists.

While taking this course, you will learn how to find and use source records, evaluate genealogical evidence, document each item, and maintain orderly records. Course materials include several valuable appendixes.

For further information, write to us at:

National Genealogical Society  
4527 17th Street, North

Arlington, VA 22207-2399

Or contact the society by telephone at:

(703) 525-0050

(800) 473-0060 Toll Free

(703) 525-0052 Fax

#### Recommended Reading List

Bentley, Elizabeth Petty. County Courthouse Book. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1990.

The Genealogist's Address Book: 1992-93 Edition. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1992.

Crandall, Ralph. Shaking Your Family Tree: A Basic Guide to Tracing Your Family's Genealogy. Camden, ME: Yankee Books, 1986.

Croom, Emily Anne. Unpuzzling Your Past: A Basic Guide to Genealogy. White Hall, VA.: Betterway Publishers, 1983.

Doane, Gilbert H. and James B. Bell. Searching for Your Ancestors: The How and Why of Genealogy. 6th ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992.

Dollarhide, William. Managing a Genealogical Project. Rev. ed. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1991.

Eichholz, Alice, ed. Ancestry's Red Book: American State, County & Town Sources. Rev. ed. Salt Lake City: Ancestry, 1992.

Everton, George B., Sr. The Handy Book for Genealogists. 8th rev. ed. Logan, UT: Everton Publishers, 1991.

Greenwood, Val D. The Researcher's Guide to American Genealogy. 2nd ed. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1990.

Kemp, Thomas J. International Vital Records Handbook. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1990.

Lackey, Richard S. Cite Your Sources. 1980. Reprint. Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1985.

Meyer, Mary K. Meyer's Directory of Genealogical Societies in the U.S.

and Canada. 9th ed. Mt. Airy, MD., 1992.

Pence, Richard A., ed. Computer Genealogy: A Guide to Research through High Technology. Rev. ed. Salt Lake City: Ancestry, 1991.

Rubincam, Milton. Pitfalls in Genealogical Research. Salt Lake City: Ancestry, 1987.

Stryker-Rodda, Harriett. How to Climb Your Family Tree. Reprint. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1987.

Szucs, Loretto Dennis and Sandra Hargreaves Luebking. The Archives: A Guide to the National Archives Field Branches. Salt Lake City: Ancestry, 1988.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Where to Write for Vital Records: Births, Deaths, Marriages, and Divorces. Publication No. (PHS) 93-1142. Hyattsville, MD., 1993.

A text copy of this material is also available.