

Getting Started in Family History Research

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1) **Who knows** the most about the family?

2) **Interview** skills:

- Select a specific generation, person or incident to learn about
- Book an appointment,
- Tell them what it is about (pick one focus)
- Ask if they have any old papers, letters, certificates or photos
- Brainstorm a list of questions ahead of time
- Avoid leading questions,
- Come ready to record what they tell you,
- Bring a thank-you

3) **Stuff?** What stuff?

- Family 'stuff', items that belonged to ancestors
- books on your family

4) **What do you know?**

- Family Group sheets
- Pedigree charts

On paper: Write in ink : *proven* Write in pencil : *clue or best guess*

On computer program: highlight proven facts, leave others plain

5) **Sources? Why bother with those?**

Primary Source: always the most reliable

- anything created at the time the event took place:

Examples:

- living person: adult witness to an event

Secondary sources: always need to be verified

- anything created at a later date:

Examples:

-have they cited sources? Are the sources primary? If not, why not?

A Preponderance of evidence: a collection of different secondary sources which cumulatively convince you of the facts. Be cautious- sometimes they are all repeats from one erroneous source.

6) **Work backwards?**

Start with what you can *prove* and work back into the unknown. Use the evidence to suggest the path to follow

7) **Method of researching**

A) Decide for whom you are going to search, by looking at your charts. Who has some details in ink and others in pencil? Start there. Ask a specific question. When was GG born?

B) Look at the secondary sources and check accuracy against *primary* sources.

C) Family stories and clues

D) Make a Research List: everything you *could* search for and where to search. Start with the most likely to lead to success.

E) When using the internet to search,
-use the least amount of information first, if you get 1000's of hits, narrow the search by adding more information, until you have a bearable amount of hits to work with.

F) Try *every possible variation* of spelling when searching on the net. Try using a few letters followed by * to open up other possibilities.

G) Stay focused on your research goal, (don't get *too* distracted ☺)

- H) Know the history of the area:
- When did the town incorporate? Were your ancestors there prior to that time? If so, where would the records have been kept?
 - What was the original business/industry that drew people to the area? And where did most of them come from?
 - Who were the founding families?
 - Is there a local history group that might have written a history of the area for the period you are searching? Were they involved in settling the area?
 - How were they affected by war, natural disaster (flood, fire, earthquake, etc) or other events important in the history of the town, county, state or country?
 - What was the economy like at the time?
 - What churches were established at the time your ancestors lived there?
 - Where are the old burial grounds located? If they have been relocated, what happened to the records?
 - What newspapers operated at the time and does the local library have copies?
 - Are property owner records available at the town library or city hall?
 - Sometimes towns moved or died out, due to flooding, fire, war, earthquake, a recession, etc. Where did the people go? Where are the records?
- I) Know the geography of the area: it greatly affects settlement patterns.
- Examine maps of the topography, then look at maps *from the period* showing rivers, roads and railways.
 - For maps *from the time period*:
 - local (town) libraries, university libraries, regional or county libraries. Check online
- J) If having trouble finding ancestors:
- census
- K) Go to the *Wiki* on your area of research.
- familysearch.org → Search → Wiki → place name
 - Attend conferences or classes, in person and online
 - Research tutorials free at: www.genealogy.com/university.html
- 8) **Keeping track:** Research Logs
- write down what you have done, where you looked and what you found/didn't find.

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- Make a *copy* of the Original.

9) **Computer Programs for organizing your family:**

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|---------------------|---|---|
| -Legacy Family Tree | } | All accept digital copies of documents and photos |
| -Ancestral Quest | | |
| -Roots Magic | | All generate charts and forms |

10) **Filing System**

11) **Family History Centre**

12) **Share, Share, Share**

Sharing is the best way to get ahead.

Keep talking to the relatives about what you are doing. Let them know the lines you are working on, especially when your focus shifts.

Tell them little stories about their ancestors.

Ask questions and show respect for their contributions, even if they don't seem pertinent. One day, this person may supply the little gem you need to connect the dots.

Put your information online, so others can find *you*.
(familysearch.org & ancestry.ca)