



Getting Started in Genealogical Research

by Betty Jo Stockton for the Central FL Genealogical Society, 2013

Start at home

1. Write down all that you know about yourself and your family.
 - a. Start with a Family Group Sheet to record your information. (Family Group Sheets are available inexpensively at the Orlando Public Library's Book Store or at the Family History Centers of the LDS Church or as a free download from various genealogical websites.)
 - b. Create a Family Group Sheet for yourself, your parents, your grandparents and each of your married siblings. Record where you got each piece of information — even if it is “personal knowledge.”
2. Gather any records you have relating to your family. Look for birth or death certificates, Bible records, newspaper articles, letters, photographs, etc. Be sure that each is labeled as to where it came from and, in the case of photographs, who the people are (full names, dates, and location.) Make copies for your files and store the originals in a safe place.
3. Question your immediate family members. Ask them to tell you what they know of the family, to gather documents or memorabilia they might have and to give you names of others who might have more information.

Work backwards from yourself

1. Keep a pedigree chart to record each generation behind you.
2. Be sure to find out all you can about your ancestors and **all** their siblings. Your ancestor's brothers and sisters had the same parents your folks did and may have left a better trail.

Expand your search

1. Check with extended family members as to what they might have to help in your search. You never know what your parents or grandparents may have stored in a cedar chest or your elderly aunt may remember. Ask the same questions more than once. Listen to the stories for clues for further research.
2. Interview (preferably on audio or video tape) your older family members. Ask not only about their family but also about their experiences.
3. Check with neighbors or friends who knew your ancestors; they may have photographs or stories that include your folks.
4. Write to vital records offices for birth and death certificate of your family members. There are many clues to be found there. Check the library or genealogy reference materials for addresses.

Organize what you find

1. Put the information you've gathered into a format that is organized and easy to use. Be sure to record names, places, dates and the source of your information.
 - a. If you're using a computer, enter the data into one of the many genealogy programs. Print out **Family Group Sheets and Pedigree Charts**.
 - b. If you are working by hand, continue to fill out **Family Group Sheets** for each family unit you find. Use **Pedigree Charts** to help show relationships.
2. Keep a record of where you've looked, what you've found and when. Many genealogy programs include a **Research Log** or you can find them on the Internet or in most beginner's genealogy books.
3. Keep a list of what you still need to know — a “**To do**” list.



Visit your local library

1. The Orlando Public Library has a wonderful genealogy department on the 4th floor of the downtown library. There you will want to check:
 - a. Census records - Check the census for the earliest year that you are certain where your ancestors were. Orlando Library has census records on microfilm for 1790-1930. They also have a subscription to Ancestry.com which has all the census years indexed and with digitized images of the census. Heritage Quest is also available through local libraries, with access from home. It has census images for all the federal census records - and is indexed by head of household.
 - b. Family history books on your family name
 - c. Books and periodicals on the area in which your ancestor ancestors lived.
 - d. Passenger lists for your immigrant ancestors
2. The LDS (Mormon) Church maintains Family History Centers in most towns. Volunteers there will help you get started and show how to access the massive amount of information that has been preserved. There are several in Central Florida - i.e. Orlando, S. Orlando, Hunter's Creek, Clermont.

Join a genealogical society - or two

1. Join the genealogical society in the area where you live. You'll get interesting programs and informative periodicals as well as the company of others who share your interests.
2. Join the genealogical society in the area where your ancestors lived. These are the folks who know or are gathering information on the areas that interest you. Put a query in the newsletter of that group asking for information on your ancestors.

Using the clues you've gathered, go to the area where your ancestors lived —

1. In person — Check local vital records, courthouse records, cemeteries, libraries, churches, local history groups and genealogical societies.
2. By letter — Write to the local courthouse, cemetery, library, churches, local history group and genealogical societies. Find addresses at the library or through genealogical reference books.
3. On the Internet — Search for folks with your surname or search for information from the localities where your folks lived. Good starting places are:
 - a. Cyndi's List - <www.cyndislist.com>
 - b. FamilySearch (LDS) - <www.familysearch.org>
 - c. RootsWeb - <www.rootsweb.com>
 - d. Ancestry - <www.ancestry.com>
 - e. USGenWeb - <www.usgenweb.com>
 - f. Find A Grave - <www.findagrave.com>

Look for other living descendants of your ancestors

1. Follow up on clues to descendants of your ancestor's siblings — they may have information you need.
2. Use the Internet or local phone directories to locate others of your surname to contact. On the Internet, you might try <www.switchboard.com>. Local libraries have phone directories for many places. Write, phone or visit anyone who might help.

Look for records that add depth to your ancestor's life — land records, diaries, letters, town histories, family stories, etc. Make your ancestors come alive by gathering more than just names and dates.

Enjoy the search

1. Take the time to create a scrapbook, preserve the photographs and record the stories of your family.
2. Share your findings with your family — especially the children who never knew your favorite grandfather or wonderful aunt.