



## **Searching Your Family History: Cardinal Rules of Genealogy Research**

**1. Begin collecting information with the known, yourself, and work backward one generation at a time towards the unknown, your ancestors. Don't skip to a famous person and try to make him/her fit into your history. Have at least this much information on each individual:**

- Full name including women's maiden names
- Date and place of birth
- Date and place of marriages & divorces
- Date and place of death & burial
- List of siblings and children

But if that is all you have in your family history, it will be very boring. Use these types of sources to start filling in the gaps and make your family history come alive!

- Adoption Records
- Baby Announcements
- Baby Books
- Bank Books
- Baptism Records
- Birth Certificates
- Citizenship Papers
- Confirmation Record
- Death Announcements
- Death Certificates
- Diaries & Journals
- Diplomas
- Discharge Papers
- Divorce Papers
- Employment Records
- Family Bibles
- Family Business Papers
- Family Stories
- Family Letters
- Family Pictures
- Funeral Guest Books
- Graduation Records
- Heirloom Jewelry
- Immunization Records
- Income Tax Forms
- Insurance Records
- Land Records
- Marriage Records
- Military Awards
- Mother's Certificates
- Naturalization Papers
- Newspaper Clippings
- Obituaries
- Oral Histories
- Photo Albums
- Property Tax Receipt
- Report Cards
- Resumes
- School Records
- Scrapbooks
- Social Security Cards
- Wedding Albums
- Wedding Guestbook
- Wills & Estate Records
- Yearbooks

**2. Read books on "how-to" do genealogy. The library has many fine books that explain the process of researching your family history. Learn from other's experience and don't make unnecessary mistakes.**

Take genealogy classes either from the library or the local genealogical society.

**3. Collect family stories and personal testimonies** These should be verified in other sources. Talk to all of your relatives, particularly the older ones, and collect family stories and information from them.

Topics to ask about:

- Full Name
- Parents
- Siblings
- Childhood Home
- Family Relations
- Hobbies
- Family Income
- Seasons & Special Occasions
- Religion
- Birthdate & Place
- Marriage
- Children
- Politics
- Military
- Friends
- Schools
- Games
- Career
- Hometown
- Historic Events
- Family Traditions
- Sports

**AND...** Be sure to ask if anyone else has ever worked on the family history!

**4. Organize your research and keep it organized!**

- Use Ancestor Charts and Family Groups Sheets to organize your information.
- These charts are available free online:  
<http://c.ancestry.com/pdf/trees/charts/anchart.pdf>  
<http://c.ancestry.com/pdf/trees/charts/famgrec.pdf>
- Choose a filing system and/or computer program to contain your research.
- Use a log to track your research. Who have you requested information from?
- Have they replied?  
<http://c.ancestry.com/pdf/trees/charts/correc.pdf>
- Make back up copies of all records and computer files and store some copies away from your home (safety deposit box, someone else's home.)
- Protect irreplaceable documents in a secure location. **NEVER** take original documents on trips to do research.

**5. Use a set format for recording your information**

- Capitalize surnames, it makes them easier to read. I.E. John SMITH
- Dates; month, day, year. i.e. January 1, 1989. The month should be spelled out or use a three letter abbreviation to avoid confusion. Do not use a number for the month. Use four digits for the year since you will be researching different centuries.
- Places should go from the smallest, most local to the larger, i.e. City, County, State, Country. i.e. Lodi, Harrisville Township, Medina County, Ohio, USA.
- If you use any abbreviations, be sure to supply a key to what the abbreviations mean. Don't assume everyone uses the same abbreviations.

## **6. Completely document the source of your information.**

- When gathering information from relatives, be sure to record the date and location of the interview and the full name and relationship to you of the person.
- When using an Internet source, cite the full name of the resource, and the date and how accessed.
- For government records, list location (city, county, state) and volume number and page and the date found.
- When using books, list the full title, author, copyright date, page number and where the book was located (ex. Delaware County District Library Local History room.)
- Put citations on your sources. For an explanation of this process you can read two resources: “Evidence! Citation & Analysis for the Family Historian”  
“Evidence Explained, citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace”
- Your goal is to make it possible for someone else to retrace the steps in your research.

## **7. Use these resources to further your research**

- Vital records, birth, death and marriage records, are generally held at county or parish court houses and state departments of vital statistics. Handybook for Genealogist and Ancestry’s Redbook list where vital records can be found anywhere in the world. [www.vitalrec.com](http://www.vitalrec.com) is an online resource.
- Census records for the U.S. are held at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. HeritageQuest.com and Ancestry.com (and the library version AncestryLibraryEdition) all provide access to the Federal census records.
- U.S. military records are held either at the National Archives <http://www.archives.gov/genealogy/military/> or the National Military Personnel Records Center (NPRC), in St. Louis, Missouri
- Libraries are good sources of information on general history, genealogy processes, state and national indexes, and local or county histories.
- Internet sources, like the ones mentioned above, as well as the GenWeb network of sites can help further your research.

All of these sources, and more, are covered in any good genealogy “how-to” book!

## **8. Share your research and your questions**

- Produce copies of your research and share with interested family members.
- Make a copy for the libraries and genealogical societies in the counties and states where your ancestors resided.
- Share your research online with others interested in the same names and locations as you are, via mailing lists on [Rootsweb.com](http://Rootsweb.com) and [familysearch.com](http://familysearch.com) (Do not share information on living persons. Not everyone is as honest as you are!!)

**9. Remember: You are never “finished” with your family history. For every new person you find, there are at least two more people you must find, the parents!**