

Documenting Your Family History

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As you learn how your own family lived and worked in the past, you will learn more about yourself.

Documenting Your Own Historical and Genealogical Records

There isn't anything quite like the experience of learning more about your own history. This program topic will provide basic information for documenting your own historical and genealogical records. A second type of search you will want to consider is to learn about your family health history. The more you know about it, the stronger your family's preventive health plan can be. Third, a growing trend is to trace your roots with DNA. This approach uses genetic tests to further explore a family tree. While DNA testing doesn't take the place of published records, it adds another dimension to understanding your family's way of life.

As you proceed with any or all of these approaches, you will open up new vistas of your past. This is a wonderful gift to yourself. The future generations of your family will love you for it!



Tap into Your Historical and Genealogical Records

Learn all you can about your family from home and family sources. Interview or correspond with family members. Focus on your older relatives. Begin right away keeping and categorizing audio and written records. When you compile a family history, any piece of information – oral or written – that links a name, place, and date together may help you in identifying kinship lines. As you gather data, record it on preprinted forms (genealogical charts and family group sheets) or use a computer program.

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Don't overlook the paper sources or heirlooms you may find in an attic or uncover through conversation—books, clippings, marriage certificates, death and divorce records, previously compiled family histories, letters, diaries, journals, insurance policies, military records, photographs, records of home and real estate transactions, records of membership in organizations, school reports, scrapbooks, slides, wills and estate papers, correspondence, and other written materials as well as heirlooms such as birthday, sympathy, wedding, and other occasion cards, toys, and other collectibles. These can reveal a great deal about the life, interests, and time of your ancestors.



Remember, the goal is to connect each generation to the previous one in such a way that you know you are claiming the correct ancestors on your family

tree. Start with your parents and grandparents and their parents. Try to determine the following: birthplaces and dates; parents; when and where they attended churches and schools; occupation; when and where they married and to whom; names of children and when and where children were born; death dates, death places, and burial places.

Keep Good Records

Cite the source for all information. Be passionate about accuracy. Your list of facts from legitimate sources gives your research validity and credibility. Confirm the parents and children in each generation so that you know you claim the correct ancestors and their correct history.

Expect your family names to be spelled in different ways in public documents.

Keeping track of what you gather is a large part of documenting family history. Prepare a separate system for each surname early in your work

Searching West Virginia Roots

Until 1863, the area now known as West Virginia was part of the Commonwealth of Virginia. The library collections at the State Archives in Charleston include some Virginia materials,

but most of its records pertain to what is now West Virginia. The archives in Richmond, Va., are rich with early history of this area of the country. University libraries in Morgantown and Pittsburgh have much to contribute to your search.

Good genealogy libraries in the state include a broad selection of county histories, community histories, published court records, census records, cemetery readings, and state daily and weekly newspapers. Many have extensive collections of family histories. They usually maintain some family and local histories from adjacent states.

Reference guides to records dating from the 1700s are useful for initial genealogical research. Among them are:

- Edgar B. Sims, *Sims' Index to Land Grants in West Virginia*, Springfield, VA, Genealogical Books in Print, 1952, 1992. Reprinted, 2003.
- Ross B. Johnston, *West Virginia Estate Settlements, 1753-1850*. Baltimore, MD. Genealogical Publishing Co., 1977.
- Robert Armistead Stewart, *Index to Printed Virginia Genealogies*. Baltimore, MD. Genealogical Publishing Co., 1930. Reprinted, 2003.
- William Thorndale and William Dollarhide. *Map Guide to the U.S. Federal Censuses, 1790-1920*. Baltimore, MD. Genealogical Publishing Co., 1987. Reprinted, 2005.
- *West Virginia Gazetteer of Physical and Cultural Place Names*. Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Geological and Economic Survey, 1986.

If you are new to the Internet, these sites can help you identify what is available online.

1. Cyndi's List at www.cyndislist.com
2. The World Gen Web Project www.worldgenweb.org

The following are some of the largest and best sites for finding indexes, databases, transcripts, and digitized documents.

1. www.familysearch.org. The Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' digital database.
2. www.rootsweb.com uses databases submitted by users.
3. www.Ancestry.com is the largest of the commercial (subscription-based) genealogy record sites.
4. www.Genealogy.com, is smaller than *Ancestry.com*, less expensive and more focused.

2006: 10M

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