

Beginning Genealogy

Where do I start?

1. **Identify what you know about your family** - Your genealogical research should begin with family and home sources. Look for names, dates, and places in certificates, family Bibles, obituaries, diaries, and similar sources.
2. **Start with yourself** - and track back each succeeding generation. Ask your relatives for any additional information they have. It's very likely that your second cousin, great-aunt, or other relative has already gathered some family information. Talk to your parents:
 - Where did they grow up (town, county, state?), Date and location of their marriage?
 - Birth and death dates of their parents?
 - Where are their parents and grandparents buried?
 - Do they know any older living relatives? Call or visit other relatives.
 - Do they have any important documents you can copy?
 - Ask for birth, death and marriage dates and locations for grand and great-grandparents?
 - Do they know any family stories?

Record and organize the information you find on pedigree charts, and family group record forms. Enter or link into FamilyTree on FamilySearch.org. Still keep your own personal records as FamilyTree is changeable by others. You do not have to use computers to do family history, but they can be very helpful. Genealogical software programs help you transcribe, organize, display, print, and transmit your findings to other researchers. There are many computer programs to help organize your data:

- RootsMagic
 - Family Tree Builder
3. **Decide what you want to learn** - Select an ancestor or relative you would like to know more about. Such as where and when he was married or the names of his

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parents. If you do not know much about an ancestor, you may need to do additional research on his or her children first. For instance:

- a. If you do not know when your ancestor was married, find the birth date or approximate birth date of the first child. The first child often came about 1 year after the marriage. This will give you the approximate date needed to search for the marriage records.
 - b. If you do not know where your ancestor lived, find out where his or her children were born. Searching for the children's birth, marriage, and death records is one of the best ways to find new information about their parents.
4. **Select records to search** - Several factors can affect your choice of which records to search. You will want to evaluate the contents, availability, ease of use, time period covered, and reliability of the records, as well as the likelihood that your ancestor will be listed. Utilize the Records Selection Table for ideas of where to search. For example: if you are looking for a birth date of your ancestor, you would want to first look in vital records, church records, and bible records. Then you would search cemeteries, obituaries and census records.

Effective researchers begin by obtaining some background information. They then survey previous research, and finally they search original documents.

Background Information

You may need some geographical and historical information. This information can save you time and effort by helping you focus your research in the correct place and time period.

- ***Locate the town or place.*** Examine maps, gazetteers, and other place-finding aids to learn as much as you can about each of the places where your ancestors lived. Identify the major migration routes, nearby cities, county boundaries, and other geographical features and government. or ecclesiastical. jurisdictions. Place-finding aids are described in the “Maps,” “Gazetteers,” and “Historical Geography” sections of FamilySearch Wiki.

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- **Review local history.** Study a history of the areas where your ancestors lived for clues about the people, places, and events that may have affected their lives and the records about them. Records with information about migration and settlement patterns, government jurisdictions, and historical events are described in the “History” and “Minorities” sections of FamilySearch Wiki.

Previous Research

After gaining some background information, you will be ready to look for any research that has already been gathered by others, such as:

- Printed family histories and genealogies
- Family information published in periodicals
- Biographies
- Local histories
- Manuscript collections of family information
- Family newsletters
- Computer databases of family information
- Hereditary and lineage society records

These can save you valuable time and often provide excellent information. For example, if you were researching the Pierce family, you may find a book or magazine article about your family, such as the *Pierce Genealogy: Being the Record of the Posterity of Thomas Pierce*. Remember, however, that the information in these sources is secondary and may need to be verified by original records.

Original Documents

After surveying previous research, you will be ready to search original documents. These records can provide primary information about your family because they were generally recorded at or near the time of an event by a reliable witness. To do thorough research, you should search the existing records of:

- Each place where your ancestor lived
- The complete time period when he lived there
- All jurisdictions that may have kept records about him (church and town, county, state, and federal governments)

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5. **Obtain and Search the Record** - You may be able to obtain the records you need in the following ways:
- a. ***Internet.*** The number of genealogical resources accessible via computer is growing rapidly. If you have a computer, you can search the Internet, bulletin boards, and commercial on-line services for genealogical information. The **FamilySearch Catalog** on-line is a key tool for selecting records.
 - b. ***FamilySearch Center.*** You are welcome to visit and use the records at the FamilySearch Center. They are open to the public, and there are no fees for using the records. They also have access to premium websites for free. Contact the library if you would like more information about its hours and services.
 - c. ***Local libraries and interlibrary loan.*** Public and university libraries have many published sources as well as some records on microform. Most of these libraries also provide interlibrary loan services that allow you to borrow many records from other libraries.
 - d. ***Courthouses and archives.*** Many of the original documents you will need are at state, county, and town courthouses and archives. While the FamilySearch Center has many of these records on microfilm, additional records are available only at the courthouse. You can visit these record repositories or request photocopies of their records through correspondence. Very few archives will search the original documents for you, but, for a small fee, many will search an index and provide copies of the information they find. (See the “Archives and Libraries” section of FamilySearch Wiki article for further information.)
 - e. ***Genealogical and Historical Societies.*** Many counties and states have genealogical and historical societies that collect family and local histories, Bible records, cemetery records, genealogies, manuscripts, newspapers, and records of pioneers. Some societies are able to briefly search their records for you.

When requesting any of the above services through correspondence, you are more likely to be successful if your letter is brief and very specific. Enclose a self-

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addressed stamped envelope (SASE). You will usually need to send a check or money order to pay in advance for photocopy or search services.

Your research may be more rewarding and more effective if you can visit the library or archives and personally search the records. Examine the original sources, or exact digital copies, when possible, rather than abstracts (summaries of the original documents).

As you search the records, remember that handwriting may have been misinterpreted or information may have been omitted in indexes and transcriptions. Also look for the many ways a name could have been spelled. Because spelling was not standardized, don't eliminate possibilities when you find a name spelled differently than it is today.

6. **Evaluate, Copy and Use the Information** - Carefully evaluate whether the information you find is complete and accurate.

Ask yourself these questions:

- a. Who provided the information? Did they witness the event?
- b. Was the information recorded near the time of the event, or later?
- c. Is the information consistent and logical?
- d. Does the new information verify the information found in other sources?
Does it differ from information in other sources?
- e. Does it suggest other places, time periods, or records to search?

Make copies of the information you find and its source. Keep detailed notes about each record you search. These notes should include the author, title, location, call numbers, description, and results of your search. **Keep a research log** for this purpose.

Research logs: Fill it out as you go to keep track of where you searched.

Why use them?

1. To stay organized

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2. Remember where you have already searched
3. keep track of your sources

To obtain a digital research log:

1. go to FamilySearch.org > Search > Research Wiki and type in “research logs”. Downloadable pdf version and online versions.

Wonderful places to look for information:

- Ask Aunt Gladys - Never underestimate the knowledge of relatives.
- FamilySearch.org (Free and has one of the largest on-line searchable databases.)
- Ancestry (\$, but usually free through your local library)
- My Heritage (\$)
- Google books for town histories, also for family histories.
- Local universities and libraries. The Greene County library has a wonderful genealogical room. Write state University has a huge genealogy room.
- National Archives web site (hard to navigate but full of collections)
- New England Genealogical Historical Society- awesome for New England research.
- County courthouses- marriage, death, probate, property, and tax records
- Newspapers for obituaries, marriages, and births found at local libraries and colleges.
- Your local FamilySearch Center – its free and open to public; free partner sites including Ancestry, NEGHS, My Heritage, and many others. Plus, their knowledgeable staff is there to help and guide you.
- **Utilize FamilySearch Wiki and Catalog**

What else can I do?

- Scan your photos and label them to preserve them for future generations.
- Record your life story. Use a journal, recording device, or online journal services.
- Interview relatives.
- Index records to make them available for searching worldwide.

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RECORD SELECTION TABLE

1. If You Need	2. Look First In	3. Then Search
Age	Census , Vital Records , Cemeteries	Military Records , Taxation
Birth date	Vital Records , Church Records , Bible Records	Cemeteries , Obituaries , Census
Birthplace	Vital Records , Church Records , Census	Newspapers , Obituaries
City or parish of foreign birth	Church Records , Genealogy , Biography , Naturalization and Citizenship , Societies	Vital Records , Obituaries , History , Emigration and Immigration
Country of foreign birth	Emigration and Immigration , Census , Naturalization and Citizenship , Church Records	Military Records , Vital Records , Newspapers , Obituaries
County origins and boundaries	History , Maps , Historical Geography	Gazetteers
Death	Vital Records , Cemeteries , Probate Records , Church Records , Obituaries , Societies	Newspapers , Bible Records , Military Records , Town Records
Ethnicity	Minorities , American Indians , Societies	Church Records , Emigration and Immigration , Naturalization and Citizenship , Periodicals
Historical background	History , Periodicals	Minorities

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Immigration date	Emigration and Immigration , Naturalization and Citizenship , Genealogy , Societies	Census , Newspapers , Biography
Living relatives (and adoptions)	Genealogy , Directories , Court Records , Obituaries , Internet, Adoptions	Census , Biography , Societies , Church Records , Probate Records
Maiden name	Vital Records , Church Records , Newspapers , Bible Records	Cemeteries , Military Records , Probate Records , Obituaries
Marriage	Vital Records , Church Records , Census , Newspapers , Bible Records , Town Records	Cemeteries , Military Records , Probate Records , Naturalization and Citizenship , Land and Property
Occupation	Census , Directories , Emigration and Immigration	Newspapers , Court Records , Biography
Parents, children, and other family members	Vital Records , Church Records , Census , Phone Disc, Probate Records , Obituaries , Genealogy	Bible Records , Newspapers , Emigration and Immigration , Adoptions
Physical description	Military Records , Biography	Naturalization and Citizenship , Vital Records , Emigration and Immigration , Genealogy
Place-finding aids	Gazetteers , Maps , Historical Geography	History , Periodicals
Place (town) of residence when you know only the state	Census (indexed), Genealogy , Military Records , Vital Records , and other records with a statewide index, Soundex	Biography , Probate Records , History , Directories , Societies , Taxation

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Places family has lived	Census , Land and Property , History , Directories	Military Records , Taxation , Obituaries
Previous research (compiled genealogy)	Genealogy , Periodicals , Societies	History , Biography
Record-finding aids	Archives and Libraries , Societies	Periodicals
Religion	Church Records , History , Biography	Bible Records , Cemeteries , Genealogy
Social activities	History , Biography , Newspapers , Societies	Town Records , Court Records , Cemeteries , Directories , Obituaries