

Discover Your Family Tree

By: www.plrmonthly.com

Contents

The Quest to Learn More About Your Family A Fascinating One	3
Why People Are Compelled To Trace Their Families' Histories	3
Beginning Your Search for Your Family Tree	4
First Steps In Researching Your Family Tree.....	5
Tracing Your Roots Helps to Illuminate Your Past, Present	6
Look For Your Family; Find Yourself	7
Maintaining Good Research Practices Will Aid Family Tree Creation	7
How to Interview Family Members When Working On Your Family Tree	8
Working With Photographs In Doing Family Tree Research	9
Some Tricks of the Trade for Creating Your Family Tree	10
Retracing Your Family's Path Through Ellis Island	10
Learning About Genealogy While Researching Your Family Tree	11
Genealogists Travel In Packs.....	12
Working with Genealogy Software For Your Family Tree.....	13
The Types of Records You Will Work With For Family Trees	14
Working With a Professional To Develop Your Family Tree.....	14
The Mother of All Family Research Libraries	15
Ancillary Research When Creating Your Family Tree	16
Side Trips on Your Journey to the Family Tree	17
Definitions to Common Terms Involved in Family Tree Research.....	17
Some Helpful Sites for Researching Your Family Tree	19

The Quest to Learn More About Your Family A Fascinating One

Researching a family tree can be a fascinating pastime that ultimately, for some, will lead to a lifelong passion. Americans seem to have a special appreciation for family tree research because, in part, so much of our family history is spread so widely around the world. Whether we come from Europe, Asia, Africa or other parts of the world, we seem to be drawn to the process of family tree research because it can reveal stories that are both personal and connected to shared history.

Tracing a family tree has easier today than has ever been the case, and for this we can thank the internet for greatly easing the burden of research required for creating a family tree. In the past, if one wanted to get detailed facts about his family's past, he would usually have to travel to the locations where those documents were located. Because so much of family tree research is dependent on source documentation – birth certificates, death certificates, marriage decrees, land ownership records, shipping manifests, and so on – one could not avoid taking the steps required to procure them.

One could always choose to write to the government offices or local churches where those records are held, but that could be a long and ultimately fruitless wait, which could be frustrating if not defeating. But so much of this has changed.

Internet and commercial software applications now allow researchers to tap into large centralized repositories, and gain access to the works of numerous non-profits who collect and disseminate this information. So, although critical source document research is still often required to get a full and complete history of your family's history, a tremendous amount can be accomplished from the comfort of your home. All you need is a computer and a way to connect it to the Internet.

For those who have engaged in it, family tree research is often a very rewarding process, sometimes even quite surprisingly so. Doing this kind of research helps people better understand themselves as well as their family because it puts their personal stories into an historical context. And it illustrates how civilization has evolved over the past several hundred years.

And it is very often full of surprises. Many of us come from families in which legends loom large, and we take them as gospel. Doing a little research can sometimes prove them wrong, or, right!

Why People Are Compelled To Trace Their Families' Histories

On the face of it, it might be hard to understand what would drive someone to spend countless hours over many months and years in pursuit of information about people who have long since passed. But if you ask most anyone who has been long engaged in the tracing their family tree,

you are likely to hear a few common reasons why they started out wanting to do it, and what compels them to keep at it.

Many of us have had the experience of having grown up with older family members who told stories about their lives and the lives of their ancestors dating back decades or even centuries. These stories filled our imagination and helped us to understand where we came from. This is probably the most common reason why people get started on the idea of working on a family tree.

Working on a family tree provides one the opportunity to, in essence, stay in the company of these stories. Sometimes people find out that the stories they heard growing up were only just the beginning and that the real story or the full story is far better, richer and deeper than they ever knew. This sense of discovery which comes from following the details of the lives of family members through time and across the globe is also very inviting to many.

We also seem to have a natural drive to what to “know where we came from.” Family helps to shape our identity, and having a firmer and fuller sense of our family’s history can help us to feel like we better understand who we are the factors that influenced who we are.

Additionally, many people simply enjoy historical research, and they find it even more enjoyable to be able to place their ancestors within an historical context. People who never knew they had ancestors who were in a major war, or lived through a terrible natural disaster, or served in a royal court are enamored of the process of learning both more about themselves and about history as they go through the process.

For some people, also, the process of creating a family tree is like solving a personal mystery; it’s like doing detective and forensics work and it challenges their ability to “out think” a lack of information or missing branch on the tree.

Whatever the drive, many people find tracing their family trees to be highly rewarding and fun.

Beginning Your Search for Your Family Tree

Many people have, at least at one point in their lives, had great curiosity about family members who came before them and whom they never met. Many of us have a vague notion that we come from immigrants to America who were fleeing a famine in Ireland or war in Europe or Central America, or political persecution in other parts of the world. Still others know that they had family members from another part of the globe who came to America to search for a better life, full of more promising opportunity.

Whatever the case, people are drawn to learn more. Starting out to do research on your family tree can seem a bit daunting, if not overwhelming. But there are some simple steps to follow that will get you started.

First, start by understanding that most family tree research projects are very long term endeavors. These histories can go back hundreds of years and trace across wide swaths of the globe. And, the path of the research is often not linear; you will likely start and stop and start again on the same line of inquiry over and over as new information becomes available.

The best place to start is typically the easiest. There is already quite a bit of long-standing family history embedded in the memories and stories held by your living relatives. You can start by having conversations with them on a one-on-one basis, or by gathering them together in a room. Often times, these stories are so deeply engrained in people that having a conversation going among others helps to spur the memory. Think about using a recording device of some kind; often memories come up in pieces, and it's good to have a record of the conversation. You can take handwritten notes as well, but a recorder frees you to focus on the conversation.

Before the conversation, ask your relative to give some thought to the stories they have, and if possible, to contact others who might help them remember important details, so that when they get to the conversation with you, they have not only their own stories and memories, but places for you to go to follow up for more information.

Also, ask your relatives to bring whatever photos they have, and if possible, whatever records they might have. It is a good idea to make copies of these, and let them hold on to the original. It will be the beginning of a very large pile of such records, and you don't want to run the risk of losing records.

First Steps In Researching Your Family Tree

Undertaking family tree research is can be a fun and rewarding process. While you will find that the path of research will very quickly take you off to places you never knew you would go, there are some good steps to take in the beginning that will help you create a foundation for further research.

First, start by asking family members for their stories, memories, photographs and records. In a family of any size, you are likely to find yourself with a large collection of documents to sort through from the very beginning. It is generally a good idea to make copies of any important documents, including photographs, and make sure your relatives keep the originals.

Second, try to think about the organization of the documents from the outset. Family tree research, like a lot of research, will leave you with tons of documents. Having a good way to organize and catalog that information (especially documents that might or might not apply to your research) will save you hours of trouble.

Next, there are many options for creating electronic families trees; you can also make your own, either on a computer or on paper, if you prefer. Make sure that you keep a record of names, dates, and places, as well as where that information came from so that you can refer back to it later.

After you have your organization and documentation format down, and you've collected and recorded your immediate family's stories, you will want to start looking on the online databases. There are several databases available (and seemingly more everyday) for a subscription. There are also dozens of free online databases. The free databases are good place to start. Not only will they save you the expense, you will likely find some useful information, and you will begin to learn how to use genealogy databases without having to pay for the learning process.

Look for databases that contain the following types of records: birth certificates, death certificates, marriage licenses, military service, census, property ownership, church records, and shipping manifests, if applicable.

If you have an uncommon surname, you will also want to register that name into the appropriate registers. This way, if there are others doing the same research, you can connect with them. Connecting with other researchers is also an important component. Not only can they be a source of information about your particular family, they can more importantly help you learn how to master the process of family tree research.

Tracing Your Roots Helps to Illuminate Your Past, Present

Family tree research has long been a pastime for many, and for some it is a passion. For many American families in particular, those who can trace their family links back to Europe, Asia, Africa and other parts of the world, the process can reveal to not just the personal story of their own family, but of the larger shifts of history that can cause people to leave their homelands.

As a relatively young nation of emigrants, America has, perhaps, a unique place in the world of family tree research. Whether through the programs of Eastern Europe, famine in Ireland, the religious intolerance throughout the continent, or through the slave trade, or wars in Europe and Asia, most any American has a long and fascinating family story that describe how he got to where he is today.

Tracing your family tree has never been easier than it is today, thanks to the ease with which much of the research can be done. Because so much of family tree research is dependent on looking at source documentation – birth certificates, death certificates, marriage decrees, land ownership records, shipping manifests, and so on – in the past, if one wanted to get any level of detail about his family's heritage, he would typically have to travel to the places where those documents are stored.

The alternative would be to write to the government offices where those records are held, and this could be a long tedious wait, which could often be met by nothing more than silence on the other end.

Today, the internet and commercial software applications allow users to tap into large centralized repositories of much of this information. And while some source document research is still often required to get a full and complete history, a great deal can be done from the comfort home, and with a computer connection to the Web.

Family tree research can be a very rewarding process. Not only does it help the researcher understand themselves and the family better by putting a story and historical context around their lives, it helps to paint a picture about how civilization has evolved over the past several hundred years. It can also produce some surprising results: it is in no way unusual that people

who undertake this research learn many new things about their family and its history in the process.

Look For Your Family; Find Yourself

We are each of us the product of a long history created by our forbearers. Learning about their story can help us better understand our own. Genealogy research has traditionally been an arduous task, but one undertake as a labor of love by those who embark upon it. Much of that research has been made easier by the presence of online databases, some of them free and others not; subscription genealogy databases have sprung up rapidly in the past several years, but there are still avenues for research that do not carry a cost with them.

Family tree research is conducted throughout the world, of course, and databases containing important family tree information, like birth and death certificates, military records, census records, marriage licenses, property records and so on, are found throughout the world. There are dozens of free sites that carry this information, and following is a sampling of a few.

Internment.net might not sound like a cheery database to search through, but databases containing death certificates are invaluable to family tree research. Everyone dies, and there is almost always a record of it when they do. This database contains records of from more than three million death and five thousand cemeteries throughout the world. If you don't find the death record you are looking for on this site, you can find links to additional sites like it around the world.

The RootsWeb Surname List is another such free site that contains information valuable to the process of family tree research. This site is a registry of more than one million surnames from around the world. The surnames are provided along with contact information for the person who registered the name. You can also register your own surname for free.

The International Genealogical Index is a collection of important birth, marriage and death records from across the globe. It contains records for more than 285 million people, and most records are from the period between the 1500s and the early part of the last century. This kind of site is a perfect place to begin for those whose family might have hailed from the UK, the Caribbean, Central and South America, throughout Europe and the Southwest Pacific region.

This is just a small sampling of the types of free sources for critical records and other information you will need for your family tree research.

Maintaining Good Research Practices Will Aid Family Tree Creation

Researching your family tree is like conducting most any type of research, and there are some basic steps to good research practices that can help aid the process of filling out your family tree as well. Research is a discipline that yields great results when followed, and often frustration and hours or days or months lost when not followed. Poor research practices can also cause you to completely forget or misplace critical information that cannot be replaced. So, it is worthwhile to establish good research practices from the outset of your project.

To start, think about organization, both in terms of the principles of organization you will use (will you organize by date, by place, by related family name, or some combination of those), or and in terms of physical organization (where and how will you store physical research, such as photos and records?). Understand that you cannot anticipate in the beginning how to best organize as you go forward, but you can put into place a system that will grow and change as the research evolves.

Once you have your organization in place, it is a good idea to get into a detail oriented mindset. Gathering important information in the form of records and so forth is critical, but you should also be in the habit of documenting the sources of that information. It is not at all unlikely that you will need to go back to those sources months or years down the road for additional information, and that information will be lost to you if you do not document it when you received it.

So, for example, if you receive a birth certificate from 1759 which came from a small village in England, write down the date, the name of the village, where in that village you received the certificate from, who sent it to you and how you found it. This might seem like a tedious process, but it could mean the difference between being able to move forward at some point down the line, or not.

Along the same lines, keep account of your lines of inquiry. There will often be several path of inquiry open and active at the same time, so be sure to keep a log.

Another good research tactic is to keep a journal of your activities. Journals do not have to be as detailed as other record-keeping devices, but they will help to document your impressions, thoughts, and additional ideas for further research.

How to Interview Family Members When Working On Your Family Tree

Family trees, like the families they represent, can sometimes be a little hard to sort through. Families form some of our deepest connections, and the stories they hold contain the range of human experience, from the tragic loss of a young life, to the glorious achievement of widespread fame, to the simple and profound accomplishment of raising children to exceed the dreams of their parents. All of these stories are resident in your living families members and are a good place to start when kicking off your family tree project.

There are some good questions to start with when asking your relatives to contribute to the project. First you want to get a sense of the important details, like the names, birthdates, places of birth, date and places of death, and so on of all of their direct family members and of anyone else that they can provide. These details are crucially important to moving forward.

But there are the stories as well, and those stories contain both useful and entertaining pieces of information. When working with your relatives, try to focus them on the things that helped to shape the time period of their early lives, or those of deceased family members (like parents) that they can remember.

Ask them about their school experiences, about the state of technology at the time, about how they handled technological change, or social change. Ask them their opinions about wars they might have experienced. And don't be afraid to ask them about the potentially difficult things that happened in their lives, like the loss of a child, spouse or beloved friend.

Also ask them about political movements of their time, or large-scale economic events like the Great Depression or the Roaring 90s. Same with questions about fashion. Look for points of comparison; for example, many seniors did not grow up as adults with credit cards. How was life different for them because of this?

The whole point of a family tree is not to just to fill in the blanks, but to root that information into solid soil so that it lives on for future generations. The tree is composed of the facts of their lives and the stories provide the soil into which they are rooted.

When your family tree is used and built upon by future generations, they will be able to look at your documentation of these family stories as well, and in that way the stories will live on and become part of their understanding of their world and the family's place within it.

Working With Photographs In Doing Family Tree Research

Researching your family tree will likely take you places you never knew you would go. While many families have long and dynamic memories that they share about their forbearers, there is no telling what you will unearth when you start to dig a little more deeply into the story of your family. There are many parts of this process, many databases to check and much source documentation to sort through as you piece the story together.

And, one important component of that is photographic record. Photographic records are very important in helping to fill out the missing details of a family tree for a number of reasons. For starters, photographs contain not just images of our long-gone relatives and the places they lived, but important documentary information as well.

Photographs can you something about the period these relatives lived in, their living conditions, their standard of living, and even sometimes their occupation. They can also hold hidden gems. For example, a photograph of unknown family members standing in front of the vessel they used to come to America can hold an image of the vessel with its name on it if you look carefully.

So these photos should be not just collected and categorized and enjoyed, but treated as containing a lot of important information that will provide further clues about how to learn more about your family's story.

That said, photographs are also very useful for learning more about the families and their members as well. Often times in the course of research, you will receive photos (from other family members or in local records) that are known to contain images of family members. However, not all of the family members in the photo can be identified, and sometimes none of the family members in the photo can be identified. While it might be tempting to think of these photos as not being useful, it is best to study them, and hold on to them.

A photograph that is known to contain a picture of a unknown family member might seem useless, but if you look carefully, you can see that he is wearing a German navy uniform from World War II and that he has won decorations. This tells you an enormous amount, and gives you an idea about where to go next to find out more.

This is the interesting thing about researching your family tree; you never know where things are going to lead. Much of the work you do will be in an effort to simply learn more so that you can progress to the next step of the process (where, likely, you will find incomplete information as well).

Some Tricks of the Trade for Creating Your Family Tree

Creating a family tree is a slow and methodical process of pulling out of history the stories about your family that have been hidden, lost or forgotten. It takes a lot of patience and fortitude to stick with the job, and it also helps to know a few tricks of the trade. The good thing about taking up the practice of creating a family tree is that you are not alone; many people share this passion. So there are many resources available to help you while on your quest.

There are also just some good guidelines to follow. Family research is a lot like most any kind of research. A good deal of heavy lifting is required, there is no end of opportunity for frustration or stalling, and you can't always trust what you find. Therefore, it's good to form strong research habits from the outset of the project.

For example, the first best habit is to learn to document the source of everything you find. You will want to cite all your sources if you decided to publish a family tree narrative, so there is a good practical purpose for it ultimately. But record-keeping of the sources of your information will also help in the research process itself. Oftentimes, you will find you come to a (at least temporary) end of the road and you will need to halt research in one area to pick it up in another. Much time can go by and your memory of where you found what information will fade.

Therefore, having a record of these sources will help save you from the possibility of having to redo research or lose the research altogether.

Second, look at all the information that comes your way with a bit of skepticism. Always have an analytical mindset about the discoveries you make; in particular about the discoveries that are especially interesting or glorifying. Many people have discovered that their ancestor wrote the words to "Silent Night." Fact is, only one (or perhaps a couple) of them did.

Families are full of legends about such things, and while they can be accepted as harmless at the family reunion, they will undoubtedly undermine your family tree research. Above all else, stay true to the facts of your research. If you want to write fiction, do that. But if you want to tell the story of your family, stick with family tree research and the facts you find while conducting it.

Retracing Your Family's Path Through Ellis Island

Few things are more iconic of the American experience than Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty that stands above as a welcome to immigrants from around the world. The United States is, as it is said, a nation of immigrants, and a great many of them passed through the gate of

Ellis Island in the last century. As such, for those who are working on tracing their family tree, Ellis Island will also be a stop.

Thousands of people from around the world visit the actual island every year, and walk through the same buildings as millions of immigrants did at one time. The island houses a museum, picnic grounds and other attractions, and many tourists are attracted to it for its historical significance. But Ellis Island also has practical uses for genealogical research as well.

The Ellis Island website (www.ellisland.org) offers a variety of tools and databases for those looking to work on their family trees. Tools include forms and charts that are useful for keeping track of information that has been tracked down, or information that is in the queue to be tracked down. The site also contains pedigree charts, which will allow you to record names, dates and so on for four generations of your family. There is also a family group sheets, which allows you collect a lot related information on your family. Finally, there is a passenger arrival log.

You will also find information about how to hire a professional genealogical researcher to help you either do an entire set of research or just particular parts for which you are having special difficulty in moving forward.

There is also a fairly comprehensive list of other websites that will be useful in your family tree research, including a link to the huge database belonging to the Mormon Church, which houses databases that can be searched for free.

The Ellis Island web site also allows you to conduct a passenger search, which could help you identify when families members arrived in the country, on what ship and from where they arrived. The site also allows users to create and store their own records or logs of searches while on the site.

Ellis Island looms large in the American imagination, and has a place in world history for its role in welcoming millions of immigrants to the country in the latter part of the 1800s and throughout the last decade. And the records it holds can be of great use in your family tree research.

Learning About Genealogy While Researching Your Family Tree

Because family tree research is such a commonly shared and widely loved activity, there are a lot of groups and organizations that have formed to support its continuing growth. These organizations are committed to bringing their members opportunities to learn about and share the latest genealogy products and services and methods and processes.

There are numerous resource guides to help you learn more about the practice of genealogy research. As family tree research is a very popular past time in this country, there is a well spring of information on it. There are any number of books that cover the basics of how to do family research. And there are magazines, website, podcasts and blogs as well. These conferences are sponsored by state, regional and national genealogical societies and groups.

One other popular way to learn more about family tree research is through conferences held on the subject throughout the year and around the country. Genealogy conference bring together in one place all the latest in terms of books, software, databases, archival supplies and so on. And these conferences are also designed as knowledge sharing events, where experts in the field give interesting lectures and presentations on the subject.

Many of these lectures provide invaluable resources for further research. Some also record the lectures so that you can have access to them after your return home. Of course, note taking is also allowed and encouraged during the lectures.

But perhaps best of all, you are surrounded by hundreds of people who share your interest in family tree research. They are excellent networking opportunities. Most research undertakings are ultimately solitary events, so it is often nice to be in a place where so many other people are engaged in the same activity. It affords you the opportunity to learn from their experience, they from yours and to compare notes.

Many family tree research projects that have stalled for one reason or another have been revived through attendance at one of these events. Sometimes the revival occurs as a result of simple inspiration, and sometimes through the personal connections that get made during the event.

In any case, if you are interested in furthering your pursuit not just to complete your family tree, but to join in a community of others undertaking the same pursuit, you might want to consider attending one of the numerous conferences and/or networking events held around the country.

Genealogists Travel In Packs

Genealogy research, whether conducted by a professional who makes it their life work, or by a hobbyist, who makes it their life passion, is done by thousands of people. And for this reason, there is a great deal written about family tree research, as well as about issues that are related to family tree research and genealogy. There are any number of magazines, websites and blogs devoted to the subject, and if you are starting out on your quest to complete your family tree, or somewhere in that process, there are plenty of places for you to go to learn more.

Many of these blogs are updated monthly, but some are refreshed on a weekly or even more frequent basis. The following describes a few of the more widely followed blogs on the topic of genealogy, but it is by no means an exhaustive list.

The Ancestry Insider is one very popular blog that covers the issues of family tree research. It offers insight about and critique of some of the larger more popular genealogy sites, like Ancestry.com. The Practical Archivists is another popular blog, known for its ability to make interesting a subject many people find inherently less than fascinating: archiving. The blog is written in an informative and entertaining style, and helps get you over the boredom hump of an otherwise important topic.

Leland Meitzler and Joe Edmon have been writing the Genealogy Blog since 2003. They invite quests columnist to contribute their thoughts on a wide array of topics related to family tree research. There is also the very popular 24-7 Family History Circle blog, and a long list of others as well.

These blogs, in addition to providing sources of good, practical advice, are also excellent ways to simply stay in touch with the subject, meet new people and hear different perspectives about the topic, as well as learn about the latest developments in software offerings and so on.

One of the side benefits of family tree research is that it puts you into contact with the very large community of people who share an interest in learning more about their family and about the times that their family members lived in. Not only will this community help inform and inspire you, it can serve as group with which you share a common interest and can go to for direction, advice and guidance.

Working with Genealogy Software For Your Family Tree

The widespread availability and use of computers has had a profound effect on genealogy research. For those engaged in creating their family trees, these powerful tools have helped them locate research materials more readily and to document what they find. But not all genealogy research is created alike; there are some important differences that are worth considering if you are anticipating purchasing software. Following is a brief rundown of those considerations.

There are roughly 50 different genealogy applications available on the market today. The first and most basic question is what type of operating system does your computer use. There are different applications available for different operating systems, but not all software will work on all computers.

The important things beyond that to consider are just that some applications are designed to help with only certain limited aspects of genealogy, while others will help you many different aspects of the process. The trade-offs are usually this: price, features and the amount of time it takes to fully utilize the software.

The programs with the fewest features are the least expensive, and will be the easiest to learn. Prices for this software occupy a very broad range. Some of the very simplest programs are available for free download. Others will cost \$100 or more. Most can be found within the \$50 range. For the beginner, these programs are usually more than sufficient. The idea is balance out the amount of time learning how to use the software with how much time it will save you in creating the family tree.

There are other, more specialized forms of genealogy software that will help you work with particular databases significant for genealogical research, such as the database created and maintained by the Mormon Church. There are also software programs that will facilitate the process of connecting with other genealogists, which can also be very helpful in your process.

Think about how you will use the software and what you want to get out of it. Also consider how much time you want to devote to learning the program. If you are planning to be in family tree research for the long-haul and want to be able to share files with others and are confident you can learn all the functionality of the high-end software, it is probably worth the investment.

On the other hand, if you just want to do one or two simple common charts, the lower end programs are probably fine.

The Types of Records You Will Work With For Family Trees

There are many different types of information you will come across as you conduct research on your family tree, and it is helpful to know what some of the more common ones are. As you begin your process, you will want to compile a list of family members that you know or have been told about, and from there you will start looking through the available records to find additional information about their parents, where they were born and so on.

Following is a list of the common types of records you will encounter.

Church records are good sources of information, in particular for family members from before the 1900s and those who hailed from very rural parts of the world. Churches often acted like local governments do today, and were the major compiler of and repository for records of the events of the lives in the community. They will hold records of baptisms, deaths and marriages, and sometimes land purchases or other property agreements.

Vital records like birth, death and marriage certificates are common and important to your research and can also be found through local government offices.

Newspapers are another great source of this type of information. Many of them carry birth announcements, and death notices. Some carry property notices, and notices of when members of the community entered military service.

The military itself is an important source, and will hold service records of family members that were in the military.

Census records are also a good place to look for information on people's location and age at the time of the census.

You can also ask your family for some of these important documents. Family bibles were traditionally used to keep a journal of major life events for family members. They also often have birth and death certificates and wedding licenses.

Local cemeteries can also be useful. Tombstones very frequently hold names, dates of birth and death, and sometimes cause of death. Other sources of information include land records, court/probate records, immigration records, passenger shipment manifests.

Many of these sources of information are available online (at least partially) today, and so a good place to start is via web search. However, some of these records can only be located by visiting the site where they are housed.

There are many commonly used sources of information on critical records that will help you fill out your family tree. This list will get you started.

Working With a Professional To Develop Your Family Tree

Creating a family tree, especially from scratch will almost always be a very time-consuming process. Some people work on assembling their family's history for years, and enjoy every moment of it. Still others like to do some of the research, but not all. And then there are folks who just want to know what the facts and stories are and do not want to invest the time in creating the tree.

For these latter two groups, hiring a professional genealogist might be the answer. A professional genealogist tends to be someone who is highly skilled in many of the aspects involved with family tree research, such as records location. These professional services are provided for a fee and can help to eliminate or greatly reduce the amount of time required of you to conduct research. In some more obscure areas of research, they might be the only way to get critical information.

Many professional genealogists belong to the Association of Professional Genealogists, a non-profit organization founded in 1979 to promote a level of professionalism amongst its members.

In terms of the specific services you can expect from a professional genealogists, the list will vary. Some will do all the work for you, others will provide their guidance to your search, so it is important to ask questions about their range of services and fee schedules as you are evaluating whether or not to work with a professional. Some professional genealogist specialize in only certain aspects of research, such as European, military, or royal history, and some have even more highly specific areas of research on which they focus.

The Association of Professional Genealogists maintains a directory for its 1,500 members, and if you are seeking more information, their website is a good place to begin. You can use their online search database to look for a professional who focuses on any particular areas of interest to you.

While many of us have a deep curiosity about our family's heritage, not everyone has the time or inclination to devote to the long and sometimes arduous research involved to fill out the family tree. In these cases, a professional genealogical researcher can be a good solution. Just bear in mind that fee ranges for their services will vary, as will their particular areas of expertise, so it is worthwhile to spend some time to ask good questions about both.

The Mother of All Family Research Libraries

The Family History Library in Salt Lake City is enormous, and within its five floors and 142,000 square feet rests some of the most comprehensive collections of information useful in the search for family history. There are literally million of family history records housed in the facility, making it a very popular destination for family tree researchers throughout the country and around the world.

If you plan to visit, some preparation is in order. While the size of the facility and the volume of its holdings is impressive and enormous, it can also overwhelm the unprepared. Make sure that you start by checking the library's schedule; it is not always open.

The facility serves thousands of people and so has some well established processes and tools in place to help you make your visit as productive as possible. Take a look at it website for all this information as you begin your planning process. Make sure you are familiar with all of its guidelines in order to make your trip as productive as possible. It is most convenient to stay at one of the nearby hotels, and plan to walk back and forth to and from the facility, but if not parking is available.

The facility makes available an online catalog; use this to determine which parts of the library that you want to conduct your search in while you are there. Some of the documents you might need will need to be requested at least a few days in advance.

Next, make sure you are clear about what is that you want to research. Have a prepared list of names and other pertinent background information for the people who you want to research. This is not the kind of facility you want to walk into planning to just look around until you find what you want.

Once you are there, avail yourself of their free orientation tour. This tour will end up saving you time during your visit that might otherwise be spent trying to find your way around. Along the same line, the library makes copies of its floor plans available as well.

You are not allowed to bring food and drink into the facility, so plan accordingly.

The Family History Library in Salt Lake City is the mother of all family research libraries. It's size is immense and with proper planning you can use this to your advantage

Ancillary Research When Creating Your Family Tree

One of the great things about researching your family history and creating your family tree is that it exposes you to different periods of history, and very frequently, to different parts of the world. Generally, the process works by following the life stories of your relatives, moving backward in time and following the family's path around the globe. As you follow the trail, you get a sense of how large events, like wars and natural disasters, effected your family.

But there is another way to go as well. You can start by doing research on the places where you know your family is from and augment your relative search with this information. For example, say that you have relatives that you know came to America in during the potato famine in Ireland. You can start with your living relatives and work backward in time, or you can go to the bookstore and start reading up on the history of Ireland.

Start with books and material that will give you a sense of Ireland during the period which saw the greatest exodus to America. You can work forward and backward in time from there. Doing this will give you a sense of the environment and culture from which your family originated. Using this example, Ireland has its own long, deep and rich history, that dates back centuries. The people that inhabited the island of Ireland have a diverse spiritual history, a history of repeated invasion, a long and deep mythological structure, a penchant for the mystical and poetic, and there are historical reasons why all of these things exist as part of the Irish culture.

Learning about this more subtle aspects of the places and cultures that you came from will enrich your understanding of many things about your family, and perhaps yourself. Understanding that Irish immigrated to America because of potato famine is one thing, but understanding how it must have felt to survive years of poverty in their homeland only to feel compelled to leave is another.

Genealogical research does not always have to be about the personal and familial connections to the past, it can also be an avenue for achieving greater understanding of large scale events in world history and how they helped to shape the world into what it is today. This type of broader historical research will also undoubtedly give you ideas about how to pursue filling out the missing pieces of your family tree as well.

Side Trips on Your Journey to the Family Tree

Embarking on the journey to discover the history of your family is likely to take you on a series of unforeseen side trips. One that many people take while completing their family tree to find out what the meaning is of their family name.

Last names, or surnames, are a relatively recent invention in the history of man; they have been with us for about one thousand years. And there are good reasons why this is the case. First most people lived in small villages, and most people were known by who their parents were. Everyone knew who everyone was, as well as who their parents were. So a second name was not necessary.

About one years or so ago, as our agricultural and other technologies began to improve, people started living a little longer, and villages began to grow a little larger. Around this point, we began to see more naming conventions that included some kind of last name, or first name with a reference to a parent's name, occupation, or place of origin. So, we began to see names like William of Tyre, or Henry the Smith.

Somewhere around this time, the practice of using a family name as a surname arose, first among the nobility and later as a practice among the more common folk. Eventually, you began to see the use of names like Bill son of John transforming into Bill Johnson. The practice of taking a father's last name as a surname around the 1600s.

But the development of these surnames had, once again, many origins. Occupations were a common, which helps to explain why there are so many Smiths and Millers in European countries and in America.

There is yet another type of name origin, once which is a bit more playful. Some surnames developed out of the quirks of those who originally held them. Names like Broadhead or Longbottom developed out of a habit of referring to people by their distinguishing physical characteristics.

Researching your family tree will reveal a wide array of new learning opportunities to you, both about your family and about families in general. How we came to name ourselves is one such example. And for those who get so pulled by the lure of finding out the meaning to their family name, the side trip can be worth it.

Definitions to Common Terms Involved in Family Tree Research

As is in the case in most new activities, getting to know the terminology can seem like the most daunting part. For those unfamiliar with research terminology and genealogy terminology, the learning process can be slow.

Learning the language of genealogy is like learning any new language. It takes time, practice, a little patience and just a whole lot of experience. But the language can be learned. As you go through the documentary process, and as you come into contact with people who have been engaged in family tree research for many years, you will begin to become familiar with the language.

So do not be daunted. It's all learnable.

To help get you started, following is a list of some of the more common and obscure terms that come up in family tree research, along with brief definitions.

Abstract. An abstract is a brief overview.

AGLL. American Genealogy Lending Library.

Ahnentafel. A numbering system used to identify member in a tree.

Banns. Public announcement (particularly in use by churches, to announce weddings)

Census. An official count of people living within a region. Contain important records of age, number in household and so on. Typically government sponsored.

Codicil. An amendment, change or appendix made to a Will.

Collateral Ancestor. A relative, but one of indirect descent.

Consanguineous. Related by blood; of common ancestry.

Consent Avadavat. A consent given to by parents to allow underage children to marry.

Devise. To bequeath property in a Will.

Double dating. Applies to dates between January 1 and March 25 during the years 1582-1752 as a result of Gregorian calendar transition.

Metes and Bounds. A land surveying method in some states in the US that used natural markers to determine property boundaries.

Patronymics. Using the father's last name for the surname.

Progenitor. A direct ancestor.

Relict. A widow.

Relictus. A widower.

Soundex. A phonetic coding system that ties similar sounding names together.

Tiny tafel. A method of compacting a family database.

Vidua: Widow

Viduus: Widower.

The above list provides a few of the more common and obscure terms that come up frequently in family tree research. Genealogy is like most any kind of undertaking, a world full of new naming conventions, terms and language to learn. But the language is learnable. Remain patients; ask fellow family tree researchers if you don't understand a term they use, and keep plugging.

Some Helpful Sites for Researching Your Family Tree

The availability of genealogical records online has revolutionized the process of creating and developing your family tree. Whereas in the past, you could spend months locating the source of a record, mailing a request for the record and waiting for the record to arrive, today you can find many of these records in a heartbeat by looking on line.

There are numerous websites and publications devoted to those who are in the process of building their family tree and following is a description of a few of the online options for more information.

The National Archives and Records Administration website (www.archives.gov) contains a vast amount of diverse records, some of which will not be useful in your search (such as White House tapes), but some of which could be invaluable (such as the genealogy section.). Even for those not engaged in family tree research, this site contains an array of fascinating historical documentation.

The USGenWeb Project was formed by a group of volunteers who link together records from all counties and all states in the country. The site address is usgenweb.com. The site is organized by county and state and all information is available for search for free.

The National Genealogical Society (www.ngsgenealogy.org) is a non-profit organization formed in 1903 to provide help to all levels of genealogical researchers, beginners and professionals alike.

The www.1930census.com site provides information on the census and census process that was originated in this country in 1790. It is a good place to begin the process of understanding how to work with census information.

The Immigrants Ship Transcribers Guild is another group of volunteers who work to transcribe ship records and make them available electronically as a way of helping researchers more easily access this information. Their website address is www.immigrantships.net. The site currently holds more than 7000 passenger ship manifests and will continue to grow over time.

The Ellis Island website (which holds a list of the sites above, and more like them) is also a good place to go to learn more about how to conduct your genealogical research. The site, www.ellisland.org contains a great deal of database information as well as tools to help in conducting and documenting your research findings.

The Internet as a source of family tree information has been a godsend to those who are working to research their family histories. This list of sites above should help get your started on your own search.