

Genealogy - Be Prepared



Gather all of the information you have

Genealogy is more than names on a family tree. Documentation is an important part of a family history. Filling in the details of your ancestors lives and getting to know them as people is a most rewarding challenge.

You may have at hand information to add to your family tree. Beyond the obvious of birth, marriage and death certificates, look for information from a family bible, newspaper clippings (such as obituaries, birth, and wedding announcements, and other events in your family's life), funeral cards, old pictures of your family, and letters.

Then, write down what you remember from family stories. Many of these stories might be true, others may be inaccurate. All are important for the clues they will give you.

Don't forget yourself. Some genealogists get so caught up in chasing ancestors that they forget to document their own lives.



Talk to your relatives

It is always important to talk to your oldest relatives while they are still alive. Visit nearby relatives; call, write and email more distant relatives. What you are looking for are records they may have that they will copy for you, additions to the family stories, and the work some of them may have already done on your family tree.

- Be sure you write down (record) what others tell you.
- Ask where your ancestor went to school, met his/her spouse, got married. Remember location is important for further research
- Do not ignore family legends - but also do not take them as certain to be literally true. Rather, use them as yet another source of guidance for finding out the truth about the past.

Remember that perhaps not everyone will be happy about your new interest in genealogy. Particularly, older relatives may think you will unearth family skeletons.



Has it already been done?

The next step is to find out if there is someone out there researching your family as part of their own genealogical investigations. There are a few ways you can go about this.

- GRD – Genealogical Research Directory. Published yearly up to 2007, these books list family names being researched and give contacts to the researchers.
- Internet – Try Googling the name you are researching along with the words “family history” or genealogy
- Pioneer registers – these books are published by most family history groups, and are an attempt to list all of the early settlers of a given region.
- Published genealogies via the Trove site (www.trove.nla.gov.au) – The Trove site lists books and other information sources held in libraries and cultural institutions around Australia.



Set up a system for recording and organising your research

By now you will have accumulated a stack of papers. This pile will grow into a confusing mess if you don't start a filing system of sorts. Use whatever works for you.

- There is nothing wrong with keeping paper files if this is what you are most comfortable with.
- There are many genealogy computer programmes around. Most of them are very easy to use these days. The Latter Day Saints PAF (Personal Ancestral File) software is free to download from their site, and is a good way to see if this is the way you want to go.
(http://productsupport.familysearch.org/supportroot/eng/frameaset_products.asp)
- It is handy to have a supply of Family Data Sheets and Pedigree Charts on hand. You can take these with you when you visit libraries and other research centres. These can be downloaded from the LDS and other internet sites.



Decide which branch of the family tree to start your search on

The mistake that many beginning genealogists make is to try to research too many family branches at the same time. It doesn't take long before you will be confused and lost with that method.

Start with the surname that seems most promising. A little bit of success will be helpful at the start, and an easier line will enable you to gain experience before you tackle more difficult research. When you run into what genealogists call 'the brick wall', you can set aside that branch and start work on another. Once you have had a bit of experience, you might find that brick wall easier to overcome.



Get to know the resources

Visit your local library. Most libraries have a genealogical section. Familiarise yourself with what resources they have available and ask about any handouts and resource lists they may have. Learn how to use the microfiche and microfilm readers and the photocopiers.

The genealogy section is not the only part of the library you will be using. After you get into your research, you will be needing local history, language and geographical information as well.

Visit and join your local genealogical society. They can provide help on research techniques, including the Internet. The experiences of other members in solving problems and using less well known resources is invaluable. Most also have an extensive library of genealogical materials, and they will often have resources other than local.