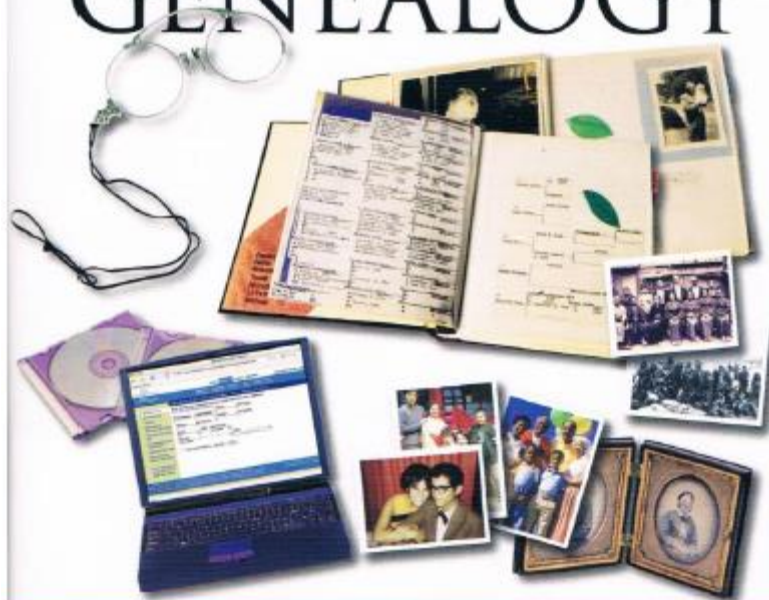


MERIT BADGE SERIES



GENEALOGY



BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

HOW TO USE THIS PAMPHLET

The secret to successfully earning a merit badge is for you to use both the pamphlet and the suggestions of your counselor.

Your counselor can be as important to you as a coach is to an athlete. Use all of the resources your counselor can make available to you. This may be the best chance you will have to learn about this particular subject. Make it count.

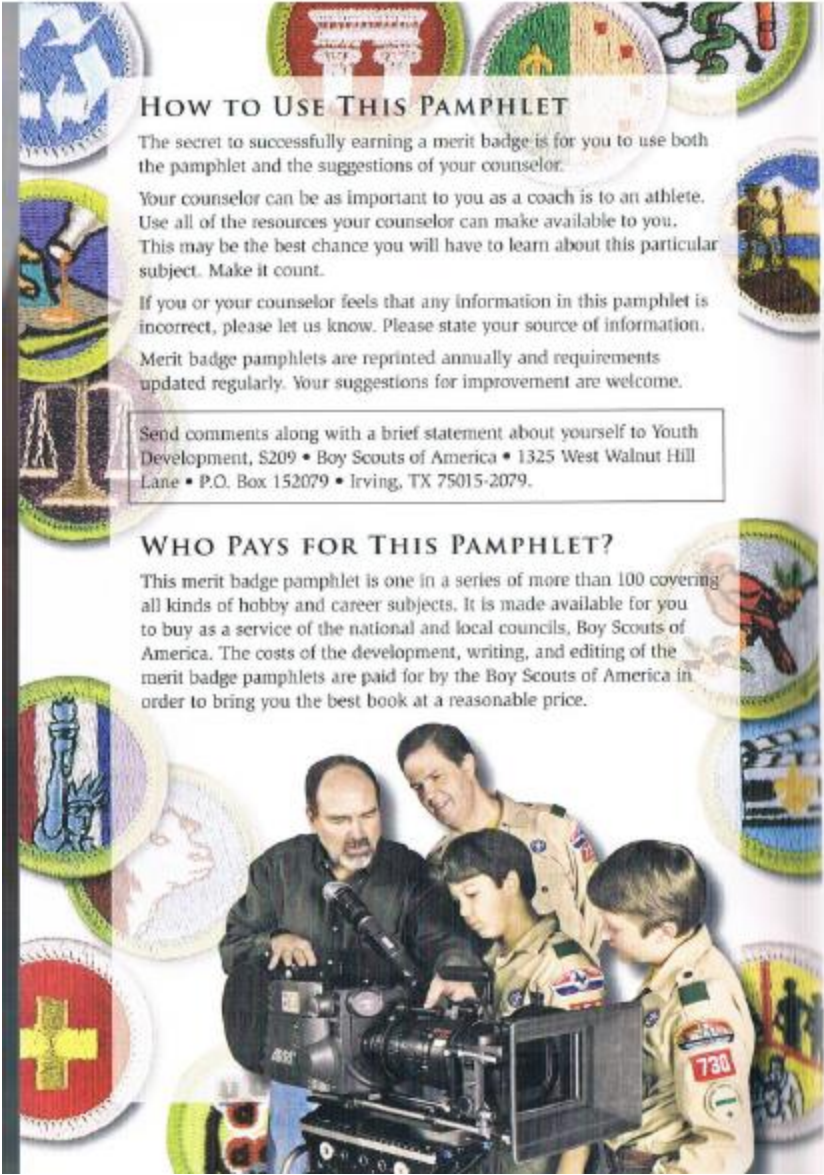
If you or your counselor feels that any information in this pamphlet is incorrect, please let us know. Please state your source of information.

Merit badge pamphlets are reprinted annually and requirements updated regularly. Your suggestions for improvement are welcome.

Send comments along with a brief statement about yourself to Youth Development, S209 • Boy Scouts of America • 1325 West Walnut Hill Lane • P.O. Box 152079 • Irving, TX 75015-2079.

WHO PAYS FOR THIS PAMPHLET?

This merit badge pamphlet is one in a series of more than 100 covering all kinds of hobby and career subjects. It is made available for you to buy as a service of the national and local councils, Boy Scouts of America. The costs of the development, writing, and editing of the merit badge pamphlets are paid for by the Boy Scouts of America in order to bring you the best book at a reasonable price.



BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA
MERIT BADGE SERIES

GENEALOGY



BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

Requirements

1. Explain to your counselor what the words *genealogy*, *ancestor*, and *descendant* mean.
2. Do ONE of the following:
 - a. Create a time line for yourself or for a relative. Then write a short biography based on that time line.
 - b. Keep a journal for six weeks. You must write in it at least once a week.
3. With your parent's help, choose a relative or a family acquaintance you can interview in person, by telephone, or by email or letter. Record the information you collect so you do not forget it.
4. Do the following:
 - a. Name three types of genealogical resources and explain how these resources can help you chart your family tree.
 - b. Obtain at least one genealogical document that supports an event that is or can be recorded on your pedigree chart or family group record. The document could be found at home or at a government office, religious organization, archive, or library.
 - c. Tell how you would evaluate the genealogical information you found for requirement 4b.
5. Contact ONE of the following individuals or institutions. Ask what genealogical services, records, or activities this individual or institution provides, and report the results:
 - a. A genealogical or lineage society
 - b. A professional genealogist (someone who gets paid for doing genealogical research)
 - c. A surname organization, such as your family's organization
 - d. A genealogical educational facility or institution
 - e. A genealogical record repository of any type (courthouse, genealogical library, state or national archive, state library, etc.)
6. Begin your family tree by listing yourself and include at least two additional generations. You may complete this requirement by using the chart provided in this pamphlet or the genealogy software program of your choice.
7. Complete a family group record form, listing yourself and your brothers and sisters as the children. On another family group record form, show one of your parents and his or her brothers and sisters as the children. This requirement may be completed using the chart provided or the genealogy software program of your choice.
8. Do the following:
 - a. Explain the effect computers and the Internet are having on the world of genealogy.
 - b. Explain how photography (including microfilming) has influenced genealogy.
9. Discuss what you have learned about your family and your family members through your genealogical research.



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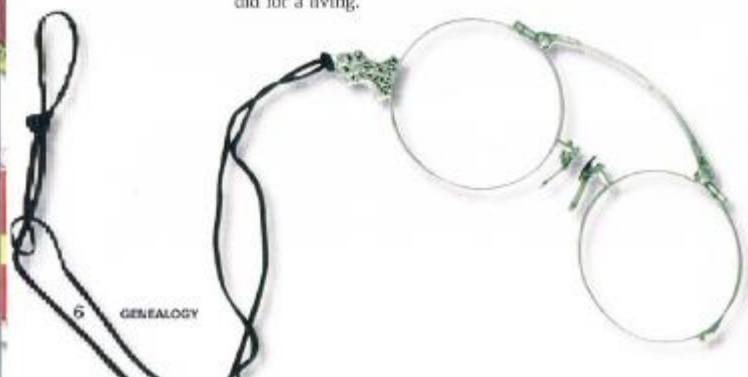
Introduction

Exploring your roots—where your family name came from, why your family lives where it does, what your parents and grandparents did for fun when they were your age—can be fascinating. Discovering your ancestors—your parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and so on—back through history is what *genealogy* is all about.

Doing genealogical research is like being a private investigator. Getting started is easy: You list your name, your birthday, and the places you have lived. Then you record the same information for your brothers and sisters and your parents and their parents. This pamphlet will help you find and organize the information you gather, learn new skills, and gain a new appreciation of who you are.

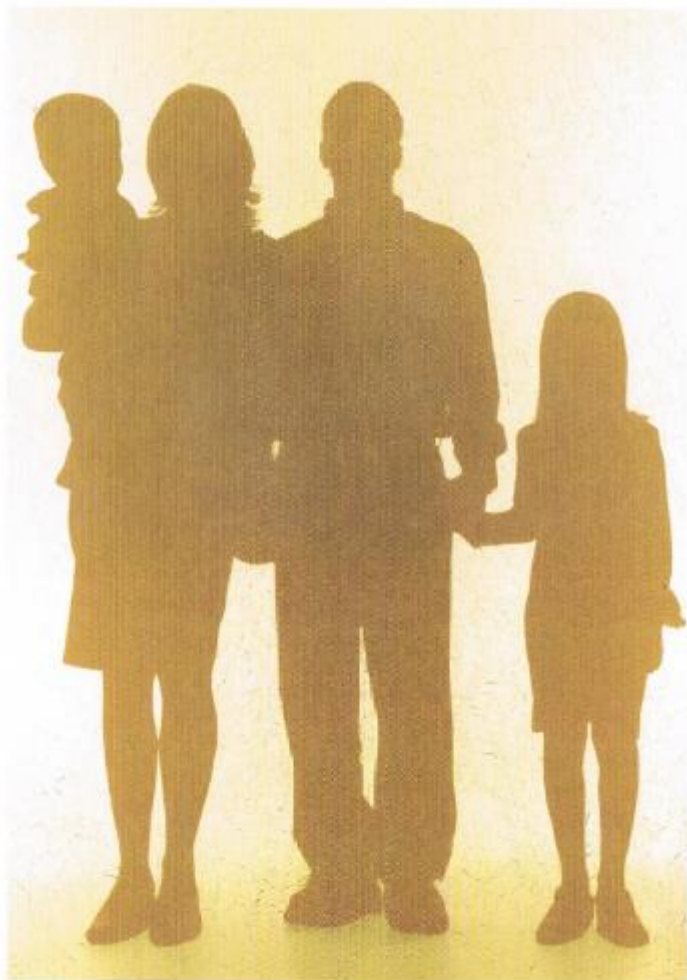
The Influence of Family and Personal History on Society

As you research your family, you will discover what life was like for your ancestors and will feel more connected to them. For example, you might find out how your grandmother felt when her first child was born or what your great-grandfather did for a living.



Discovering your ancestors' history will open doors to your own past.

Daily life might not have changed as much as we may be led to believe. As you trace your ancestors' history, you may learn that they lived in a different country, ate different food, or wore different clothes, but you probably will find that the same things that make life meaningful to you today are the things that made life meaningful to your ancestors.



Your Life and Your Family History

The easiest place to start your family history is with your own history. You can begin your life story by doing some of the following activities.

Writing a Journal

You should write in your journal on a regular basis—every day, every week, or every month. It is a log of your activities, thoughts, and feelings. You can write about things such as:

- Where you live and the room in which you sleep
- What you ate for breakfast, lunch, or dinner
- Your likes and dislikes
- The people you live with
- Other relatives and friends
- What happened in school or with your friends
- After-school and weekend activities
- Your future plans—what you hope to do or want to be

This list is just a suggestion of some topics you might discuss in your journal. Write about what is important to you.



Recording Your Life Story

A personal history, or life story, tells about what happened in the past. It may include quotes or stories from your journal or diary. In a small way, writing about your own and your family's history helps preserve the history of our nation. Start your life story by listing the following:

- Your full name
- The date and place of your birth
- The full names of your mother and father, brothers and sisters, and other relatives
- The addresses of any places you have lived

Flesh out your list by writing what you know or remember about your past and current life. You might describe the following:

- Your earliest memories
- The different places you have lived
- Your friends and what you do together
- What your father, mother, or other relatives do (or did) for a living
- Errands or household duties
- Any health problems you have had
- Hobbies
- Community activities
- Vacations
- Favorite sports, books, or music
- Schools you have attended
- Your favorite and least favorite subjects in school

You might also tell about happy, funny, or hard times in your life. Be honest about your thoughts and feelings.



Recording Family History

A family history tells of the family as a unit and describes each person in that unit. It may include quotes or stories from different relatives. A family history should include as many *generations* as possible.

When gathering family information from relatives, you will need to talk or write to them to obtain information about their lives. You might ask about the following:

- Their full names
- What they do (or did) for a living
- The names of their parents, brothers, and sisters
- What their clothes, food, and homes were like when they were growing up
- Where they lived and what was the community was like
- Community activities they were involved in
- Military service and what it was like

- Choices they made in life such as whether or not to go to college or to take a certain job
- Stories of things that happened to them—the funniest one, the most embarrassing one, the one they learned the most from, or the one they feel is most important to share with you

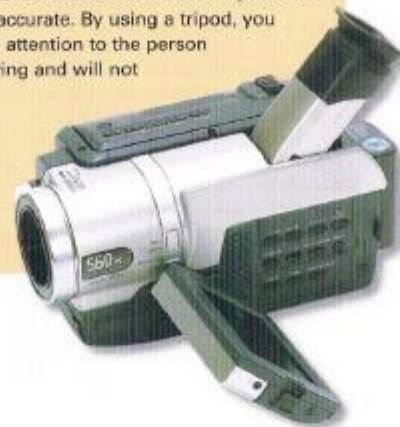


Once you start interviewing your relatives, you may learn they played an important role in history. For example, during World War II, these Navajo Marines transmitted top-secret radio messages in a military code based on the complex Navajo language. The code could not be cracked by the enemy and was crucial in a number of Allied victories during the war.

When interviewing, always be sensitive to people's feelings. Do not pressure anyone who seems uncomfortable. Move on to a question about another memory the person would be happy to share.

When you talk to someone about his or her past you are obtaining an *oral history*, as opposed to reading a history that is already written. We all have oral family histories. A good way to collect oral history is through interviews. To learn how to interview, try interviewing yourself first. Write down the questions you want to ask. Then ask yourself those questions. Either write down the answers or speak into a recorder or video camera. Once you have done a self-interview and have familiarized yourself with your recorder or camera (if you plan to use one), you can then interview your mother or father, brothers and sisters, grandparents, aunts, uncles, or other family members.

Using a video recorder makes the interview process easier and more accurate. By using a tripod, you can give your full attention to the person you are interviewing and will not get distracted by trying to write down what she or he says. Plus, the recording will become a family treasure.



Making a Time Line

A *time line* is a chart that shows the *events* in a person's life. A time line can show the events from a person's birth until the present or from birth until death if the person has died.

You can make a time line as simple or as complex as you like. It should include at least 10 items. If you want to make a detailed, illustrated time line, use large paper (such as butcher paper) so you will have plenty of space for drawing or for adding photographs. If you choose not to illustrate your time line, an 8½-by-11-inch sheet of paper will work well.

The time line shown here has a horizontal line that represents a person's life. The vertical lines indicate dates and events. The distance between the lines shows the time span between events. For example, if there is a span of five years between two events on the time line, the space on the line between those two events will be larger than the space between two events that occurred one year apart.

You can make a time line for yourself or for your father, mother, or another relative. Show the events that were important in your life or your relative's life, such as birth, births of brothers or sisters, starting school or a sports or music program, vacations, or health problems. You also can include the dates of community or world events such as the year a new president was elected.





Pages from information kept in a family Bible can tell you important dates in the family's history.

Gathering Information From Family Members

Once you have interviewed a relative, you have begun the process of collecting genealogical information about your family. You can then start preparing a family tree, or pedigree chart. When making a family tree, you should try to gather information from several sources so that you can evaluate the information and decide which information is the most accurate.

Research into any subject consists of deciding which questions you want answered and then collecting information until you have found the answers. For example:

- **Whom** do you want to learn more about?
- **What** do you want to know about these individuals?
- **When** did certain events take place, such as births, marriages, or deaths?
- **Where** did those events take place?
- **How** did your ancestors get from one place to another?
- **Why** might your ancestors have made certain choices in life?

In other words, to get the right answers in genealogy, you must begin by asking the right questions. Then you must know where to go to find accurate answers. The first place to start is your home.

As discussed in the previous chapter, you should begin by asking questions of your mother and father, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other relatives. You can do this in person or by telephone, email, or letter. Longtime neighbors may add helpful bits of information as well. If your family recently moved to the United States from another country, it is important to ask your parents and other relatives about the country where they lived. Even if you are not formally interviewing all these people, write down or record the information they tell you.

Not all the information someone tells you is necessarily correct. Relationships (such as Great-uncle Ralph was Grandpa Erickson's brother) are usually correct. But names, places, and dates may not be accurate. People tend to forget details as time passes. Later, you will need to double-check the information you gather from your family against other records.

In addition to talking with your family, look for the following sources of family history in your home:

- Certificates (of birth, baptism, marriage, death)
- Birth announcements
- Funeral programs, obituaries, and other newspaper clippings
- Wedding invitations and announcements
- Family Bibles
- Letters, diaries, and journals
- Military records and other personal records
- Deeds and wills
- Photographs

After locating these sources in your home, you can visit other relatives (or call or write to them) to find out what helpful family records they have. It can be fun to talk to them and discover what they have and to hear about what they know.



Family heirlooms can be good sources of historical information. Memorabilia such as war medals, report cards, and newspaper clippings might give a glimpse of an ancestor's personality.

Gathering Information From Records and Other Sources

After you have gathered as much information as you can from your family, it is time to start searching through records. Records will help you make sure the information you have gathered from your family is correct and will help you discover new information that your family did not know.

Helpful Genealogical Records

Now for the great mystery in genealogy—which records do you use? It is really not much of a mystery at all. Just think about how many records about you there already are. A birth certificate was issued when you were born. Your place of worship may have a record of your birth or of ceremonies you participated in. Schools you have attended have records on you as well. These are some of the basic record types that are often used in genealogy.

A good place to start looking for records is your local library or genealogical society. To find out if your community or county has a genealogical society, check the business pages of the telephone book or use an Internet search engine. If there is not such an organization near enough for you to visit, you can always call or write to one. The staff cannot trace your ancestors for you, but they can point you in the right direction.

Even if your parents or ancestors were not born in the United States or Canada, there are usually records made about them in the country where they lived. Many of the records are of the same type as those used in the United States. Use a research guide for the country to find the records that will be most helpful. Such research guides and other helps can be

Get your parent's permission before using the Internet to search for family records.

found by using the Internet sites <http://www.cyndislist.com> or <http://www.familysearch.org> along with other websites mentioned in the resources section.

Using Vital Records

Vital records are created to record births, marriages, and deaths. By obtaining copies of these kinds of certificates, you can get accurate information about names, dates, places, and other details from your ancestors' lives. These records may be created by governments or by families.

Some families keep a record of the names and birth dates of all family members. In earlier times, many people recorded vital events in the family Bible.

In the United States, each state now creates the basic vital records. This has not always been the case. In many parts of the country, counties created these records, while in other areas (in some New England states), towns created them.

Hundreds of years ago in Europe and colonial

America, religious institutions often

were the only groups that kept such records. Records made by a place of worship, however, are not called "vital records." We call them "church records" or "religious institution records." Such records can be very helpful if you are researching ancestors who were born or married in another country or in this country at a time when government records were not kept.



Christenings (baptisms) in the parish register of Poynton, Cheshire, England, 1766.

Locating Various Vital Records

The pamphlet "Where to Write for Vital Records" tells when a state began to keep vital records and gives the address and amount of the fee you need to pay to get copies of certificates of birth, death, marriage, or divorce. This pamphlet also will tell you where the records for modern time periods are housed. They may be in state archives, vital statistics bureaus, or state libraries. Records created by counties are usually stored in the county courthouse. Town records are normally in the office or home of the town clerk. You often can get copies of these records (on microfilm, microfiche, or printed in books) in genealogical libraries.

"Where to Write for Vital Records" is available free on the Internet at <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/howto/w2w/w2welcom.htm>. The same information is also available at <http://www.vitalrec.com>. If you do not have access to the Internet at home, find out whether your local library has the Internet available. Or for a small fee, you can obtain a printed copy of the pamphlet by writing to the Government Printing Office at:

Government Printing Office
732 North Capitol St. NW
Washington, DC 20401

If your parents or ancestors came from another country, the *International Vital Records Handbook* can help you find out where to obtain birth, marriage, and death records for them (see the resources section). This book is available at many public libraries and contains instructions and forms for ordering vital records from more than 200 countries.

Using Indexes to Vital Records and Other Records

Many genealogical records have *indexes* that make them easier to use. An index takes all the names from a large number of records and puts them in alphabetical order, so you do not have to waste time looking randomly through several volumes of records. Sometimes the index is in the record. Often it is a separate volume. Indexes to state vital records are sometimes available in major genealogical libraries, such as the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, Utah. In addition, there are many indexes to vital records on the Internet.

An index is just a shortcut for finding a record. It does not contain the full content of the record itself. You should always try to find a copy of the *original* record. For example, an index of birth records may include the person's name and birth date but may not include the names of the person's parents.

BIRTH REGISTERED IN NEWTON, MASS., 1903

ALL NAMES IN FULL BOOK 5 FOLIO, 181 NO. 418 WARD 10

BIRTH YEAR 1903 MONTH July DAY 6

NAME AND COLOR Edward Joseph Quinn

SEX AND CONDITION M.

PLACE OF BIRTH 26 Dalby St.

FATHER'S NAME Michael Quinn

MOTHER'S NAME Catharine McLaughlin

RESIDENCE OF PARENTS 26 Dalby St.

FATHER'S OCCUPATION Watchman

FATHER'S BIRTHPLACE Donegal Ireland

MOTHER'S BIRTHPLACE Donegal Ireland

DATE OF RECORD YEAR 1904 MONTH Jan DAY 20

INFORMANT Mother

CANVASSER

ATTESTING PHYSICIAN

F. M. O'Connell

There is another good reason why you should always try to find the original record. Every index has at least a few mistakes in it. Sometimes the mistakes are small, such as the misspelling of a name, but other times a mistake such as the one shown below could throw you completely off the trail of your ancestors.

Styerman, James	7 th M 25		1	Labourer
— Corilla	11 th F 27	Wife	1	Keeping House
— Mary	7 th F 8	Daughter	1	
— Mabel	11 th F 5	Daughter	1	
— James, Jr.	7 th M 2	Son	1	

The index showed the family's surname as *Styerman*. The family's surname was actually *St. German*. By looking at the handwriting on the original record, you can see how the person who copied the record for the index misread the name.

Some records have been destroyed by fire or other disasters. For example, many records in the southeastern United States were destroyed in the Civil War (1861–65). And in other cases, the records may never have been created. Just after the war people were too busy trying to rebuild and survive to bother with making vital records.

When government records are not available, then family and religious institution records become more important. Good supplements also are found in federal and state censuses and military records.

1880 United States Census Household Record Page 1 of 1

Household Record 1880 United States Census

Serial number | Household | Previous Household | Next Household

Serial	Person	Marital Status	Sex	Age	Month	Day	Year	Occupation	Father's Birthplace	Mother's Birthplace
1000	STYERMAN	Self	M	41	W	08	NY	Labourer	NY	CAN
1001	— Corilla	Wife	F	37	W	07	NY	Keeping House	CAN	CAN
1002	STYERMAN	Daughter	F	5	Female	W	08	NY	NY	NY
1003	STYERMAN	Daughter	F	5	Female	W	08	NY	NY	NY
1004	STYERMAN	Son	M	2	Male	W	08	NY	NY	NY

Source Information:
 Census Place: Portsmouth, Clinton, New York
 Family History Library Film: 1258523
 Roll: 78-1058
 Page Number: 1177
[View original image](#)
[Download image file](#)

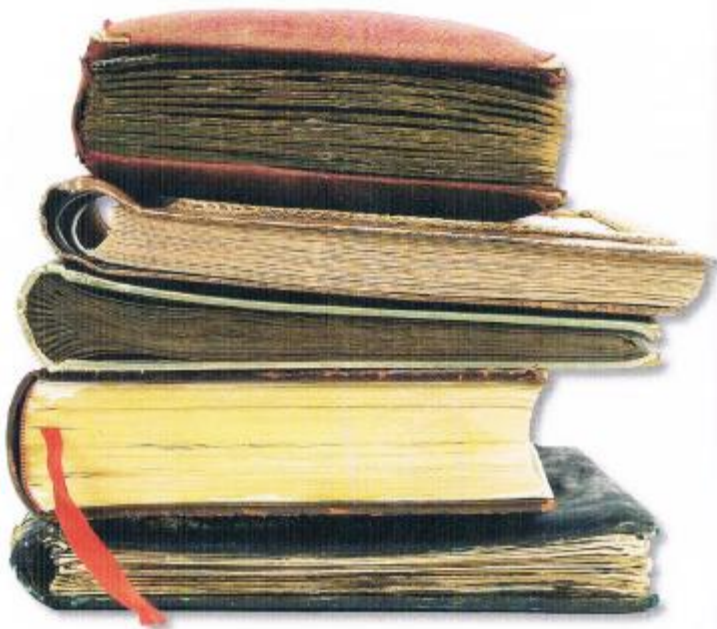
© 2003 by Intellectual Reserve, Inc. All rights reserved. English version 2000.
 See also the conditions that apply to the use of the original document.
 FamilySearch.org website: 10-2003-1. ID: http://www.familysearch.org/10-2003-1

1880 U.S. Census Index, <http://www.familysearch.org>

Using Census Records

Census records are another major type of record used in genealogy. Census records are created to help determine the number of representatives for government, how many people should pay taxes, and similar information. Census records help us piece together family histories because they often list the people who are living together in the same house. Census records exist for most countries.

In the United States, census records are one of our best genealogical sources. U.S. census records began in 1790, and in 1850 U.S. census records began to list every family member by name.



Among the legacies of slavery is the way in which enslaved African Americans were counted in U.S. censuses from 1790 to 1860. They were listed only by their first names. It was not until slavery was outlawed that African Americans who had once been slaves were able to choose surnames. Members of the same family did not always take the same name, which can make compiling an in-depth family history extra challenging.

U.S. federal census records are taken every 10 years. They are arranged by state and then usually by county within each state. Several types of indexes often are available to help you find the record of a specific person or family within the census record. The Internet has many of these indexes, together with scanned images of the actual census, and some of the services are free to use.

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE BUREAU OF THE CENSUS 45¢ PER COPY

FOURTEENTH CENSUS OF THE UNITED STATES: 1920—POPULATION

NAME OF INCORPORATED PLACE: *St. Louis*

INCORPORATED BY ACT OF THE CONGRESS: *1804* DAY OF *January* YEAR *1804*

SEX	AGE	RACE	MARRIAGE	MARRIAGE	MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE				
					1910	1920	1910	1920	
<i>M</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>F</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>M</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>F</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>

If you need to find census records for a country other than the United States, check a research guide to find out for which years censuses exist for particular countries and to learn how to access them.

A wealth of genealogical information can be found when you locate the record of your ancestor's family in the U.S. census. The censuses of 1880, 1900, 1910, and 1920 are particularly rich in detail. The 1850, 1860, and 1870 census records are helpful, but they give less information about each person. The majority of the 1890 census was destroyed by fire.

Census records do not become available until 72 years after the census was taken. Until then, everything in the census is private and can be obtained only by a close relative, who must show a need to have a copy of the entry from the census record. The latest census that is available now is the 1930 census.

To find a relative in a census record you need to know the following:

- **The name the relative was using.** For a married female ancestor this is important because she would be listed under her maiden surname. After she married, she would be listed under her married surname.
- **The place where the relative was living at the time of the census.** If you are looking for a person in a U.S. census, for example, you need to know which state and county the person was living in at the time the census was taken. In a county, you need to know which town your relative lived in. In a city, you should know the person's address or at least which part of the city he or she lived in.

Steps for Finding Someone on the Census

Step 1—Decide which census you want to search.

Step 2—Is it on the Internet? Many U.S. censuses available (and many for other countries) are on the Internet.

Step 3—Is it indexed? All of the U.S. censuses available are indexed. You can access the indexes by searching the following websites: <http://www.ancestry.com>, <http://www.genealogy.com>, and <http://www.heritagequest.cc.com>. Be sure you know whether the index you are using includes every name on the census or only the heads of households. Knowing this will affect your search strategy.

Step 4—Is there a local library, genealogical society, or Family History Center near you that has a subscription to the above websites? Access to the censuses on these websites is not free.

If there is a good *statewide index*, you may not need to know exactly where the relative lived within the county or state. However, if you do have this information, it will help you recognize your family if several people in the area have the same name.

MARRIAGE INDEX		GLIDE		
NAME	PLACE	VOL.	NUMBER	YEAR
Antee, David Merritt	Broward	244	6270	1934
Anthony, Beatrice Florence	Broward	266	17059	1934
Anthony, Jamie Laruth	Taylor	276	22467	1934
Anthony, John M.	Dade	236	2377	1934
Anthony, Johnie Lee	Marion	250	9229	1934
Anthony, Laura Inez	Hillaboro	262	15186	1934
Anthony, Lucy	Duval	260	14125	1934
Anthony, Neva Mable	Pinellas	268	18046	1934
Anthony, Sidney	Duval	236	2455	1934
Antinori, Angelina	Hillaboro	237	2824	1934
Antinori, Joseph	Hillaboro	257	12884	1934

Using Newspapers

You can find information about your ancestors in newspaper articles. You may find some in your home or in libraries or in newspaper offices. Obituaries and birth and wedding notices are where you will most often find family history information.

Tens of thousands of newspapers have been published in the United States, past and present. When looking for information about your ancestors, do not overlook smaller newspapers that cater to a particular city neighborhood, ethnic or racial group, or religious group. For example, more than 5,000 African American newspapers have been published at one time or another, some dating back to the early 1800s. Such newspapers might have printed a detailed obituary of your ancestor if he or she was well-known in the community, whereas large-circulation newspapers often print only brief death notices. A librarian can help you find newspapers that might be useful to you and can assist you in obtaining microfilm copies if they are available.





Using Cemeteries

Tombstones are a great source of information about people. For many cemeteries, the names, dates, and other information on tombstones have been copied, or transcribed, and the information put into books or on the Internet. A local genealogical society or Family History Center might be able to help you locate a transcription of a cemetery that is too far away for you to visit.

Books about the history of towns and counties often include biographical sketches of early settlers and leading citizens. If your ancestors have been in the United States for several generations, you may find information about your ancestors in one of these books.

Using Family and Local Histories

Family histories—those put together by family members—are another source of genealogical information. Relatives may have kept a copy of their family history in their homes, but sometimes they are available in libraries. They may be just lists of family members with their dates and places of birth, marriage, and death, plus the names of relatives. Or they may include detailed biographical information about each person.

Using Family Organizations

An extended family organization is one that includes your grandparents, aunts, uncles, and first cousins. It also may include your great-grandparents, your grandaunts and granduncles, and your second cousins. Members of your extended family can be helpful in telling you about your family history and genealogy.

In addition to these informal family organizations, two types of more formal family organizations are organized with genealogical purposes in mind: ancestral family organizations and surname organizations.

Ancestral family organizations are created around an ancestral couple and include all of their descendants. For example, John and Jane Clough who came to America in the early 1600s are the center of a Clough family organization. Everyone who belongs to this organization should be able to trace his or her ancestry to this couple. The purposes of a family organization are to do good research into the ancestry and descendants of a couple and to record and share the information. Such an organization often publishes major family genealogies and newsletters that may be available in some major libraries.

A surname organization is based on a surname that is associated with a specific geographical area and time period. The geographical area may be quite small, or it may include an entire country. For example, the Dewese Family of America covers the entire United States from the 1680s to the present.

Lineage Societies

Lineage societies are organizations that require a person to be able to trace and document his or her ancestry to the group of people the society is honoring. For example, the Society of California Pioneers is for the descendants of California settlers before the gold rush (pre-1850). The International Society of Sons and Daughters of Slave Ancestry is a lineage society that honors ancestors who were enslaved. Lineage societies have both national and local chapters. Your local library or genealogical society can help you identify and obtain current addresses for lineage societies that may be of interest to you.

Surname organizations are interested in the genealogical records of anyone with the surname, and they use the information they collect to try to establish various family relationships. A surname organization often records this information and deposits it in a library or archive where interested persons can access the information.

Using Genealogical Periodicals

Genealogical periodicals or magazines can provide helpful information on how and where to find sources. Information taken from censuses and vital records (from counties, towns, religious institutions, cemeteries, and family records) may also be published in them. Some of these magazines are listed in the resources section of this pamphlet. Contact your local or state genealogical society for a list of periodicals that would be helpful for your research.

Many of the periodical articles have been indexed in the Periodical Source Index, or PERSI for short. You can search PERSI for free at <http://www.ancestry.com>.

Deciding Which Records to Use

Now that you are familiar with the type of records that are available, you can start thinking about what information you want to track down. Here is one example of some steps you might take to uncover new information.

Step 1—Decide what you want to find out. For example, “Who were my great-grandpa’s parents?”

Step 2—Find out what kind of record will give you that information. You might recall that your birth certificate gives the names of your parents, so maybe your great-grandpa’s birth certificate will give the names of his parents. You also remember that your mother told you your great-grandpa was born about 1903 in Massachusetts.

Step 3—Find out where the records you need can be found. If you discover that records for births in Massachusetts in 1903 are available at the Family History Library, you could rent a microfilm copy from a local Family History Center and get a copy that way.

The Family History Library and Family History Centers

The Family History Library was founded in 1894 to aid members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints with their genealogical research. Today the FHL is the largest genealogical library in the world and is open to the general public. Anyone can use the library’s resources free of charge. In addition, more than 4,000 associated branch libraries called Family History Centers are located throughout the world. Family History Centers are often located in local meetinghouses of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and staffed by volunteers. Most Family History Centers have computers with Internet access to genealogy websites.

The FHL’s collection includes more than 2.3 million rolls of microfilm and thousands of bound books. New microfilm of genealogical records from all over the world is continually being made. There are currently 200 cameras taking microfilms in 44 countries.

All of the library’s holdings are described in the Family History Library Catalog, which is available on the Internet at <http://www.familysearch.org>. Most of the microfilms in the FHL’s collection can be rented through a local Family History Center. Usually the films must be ordered, and there is a small fee to cover the postage and other expenses.

This new information enables you to start the process over again with a new question. For example, you might now decide to see what you could find out about your great-grandfather’s brothers and sisters. A census record would list the whole family together, so you might decide to look at the first census that was taken after your great-grandfather was born. A librarian at your local library could help you access a website the library subscribes to that indexes census data. Suppose you find that the census you want—the 1910 census—has not yet been indexed. That is not a problem. You go to Plan B and search the

1920 census, which has been indexed. Your experience searching the census record might go something like this:

Librarian: "Just type in *Edward Quinn* and choose Massachusetts as the state."

You: "There are no matches."

Librarian: "Are you sure he lived in Massachusetts in 1920?"

You: "Maybe not. I think my mom said that the family lived in Rhode Island, too."

Librarian: "Let's try that."

You: "Still no matches."

Librarian: "Do you know anything else about Edward's family?"

You: "I know his father's name was *Michael* and his mother's name was *Catherine*."

Librarian: "Maybe we should try searching on *Michael Quinn* in Rhode Island."

You: "There are 11 matches! One has a wife *Catherine* and a teenage son named *Edward*!"

Librarian: "Looks like you found what you were looking for."

As you can see, you do not always get instant results. Sometimes you need to do a little creative thinking to come up with another name or place that may yield the results you are looking for. When you find a useful census record, make a copy of it. The record can give you quite a bit of information, including the ages and names of family members and the type of job the head of the household had.

How to Use the Information You Gather

As you gather information on your family, you may find that some of it includes errors and/or contradictions. Contradictions occur when two records show different things. When you find an error or contradiction, you have to figure out which sources are the most trustworthy. You might need to do some detective work in evaluating the material you have gathered.

Practice your genealogy detective skills by reading the following story. See if you can catch the errors and contradictions.



Case Study

Your dad tells you that your grandpa—his dad—*Zacharias Smith*, was born January 26, 1925, in Portland, Multnomah County, Oregon, to parents *Ebenezer Smith* and *Sara Woodbury*. Your dad also told you that *Ebenezer* was a famous lumberjack. You go to a local library and find a history of Portland, Oregon. Believe it or not, you find *Ebenezer* mentioned as a lumberjack, but it does not say that he was particularly famous. The book mentions *Sara*, but it gives her maiden name as *Woodburn*, not *Woodbury*. You decide to get *Zacharias*' birth certificate, hoping that it will tell you his parents' names. It does, and there *Sara*'s name is listed as *Sara Elizabeth Woodbury* (she was also the informant, that is, the person who informed the clerk of the birth). The birth certificate also says that *Zacharias* was born January 22, 1925. You check the 1930 census to find out how old *Ebenezer* and *Sara* were. You find them in Portland with *Zacharias* and his brothers and sisters. *Ebenezer* was a 35-year-old lumberjack and *Sara* was a 37-year-old housewife. The census also shows that he was born in Tennessee and she was born in Nebraska.

What was *Sara*'s maiden name? Two out of three of your sources said her name was *Woodbury*, while only one said *Woodburn*. Also, which of the three sources is most likely to be trustworthy? *Zacharias*' birth certificate is probably the most reliable (as long as the clerk who wrote the record did not