



Getting Started with Genealogy

Genealogy is the study of **family history**. Each of us is descended from a long line of ancestors, and tracing their lives can be a fascinating research process. By using information you already know along with the resources and records available, you can explore the past and preserve your family history for future generations.

- **Start with yourself!**

Begin by listing what you already know about your family, starting in the present and working backwards one generation at a time. Write down vital facts such as dates and locations of births, marriages, and deaths.

- **Record information**

A *pedigree* or ancestor chart is a good way to begin to organize information, and can help you identify the missing pieces of the genealogy puzzle. You'll also want to note the source of each "fact" as you'll often find conflicting information.

- **Explore home sources**

We often already own items that provide clues on our family history. You may be able to find birth, marriage, and death records, family bibles, obituaries, funeral memorial cards, military papers, yearbooks, legal papers, and old letters.

- **Talk to relatives**

A great way to uncover clues on your family history is to interview relatives. Often, by asking open-ended questions, you'll learn more about an ancestor's life than can be found in records.

Records & Resources: Where to Start?

Census Records. The U.S. Federal Census was taken every 10 years since 1790; 1950 is the most recent available. Considered the "backbone" of family research, these records usually show all members of a household in that year, and significant facts on each person (i.e. **age**, country of **origin**, and **occupation**).

Online Databases. B&ECPL subscribes to Ancestry Library Edition (similar to Ancestry.com) and HeritageQuest. Both include U.S. Federal Census records, city directories, as well as family histories, and can be used from any B&ECPL library computer. HeritageQuest can be used from home with a B&ECPL card. Ancestry LE also contains millions of other resources, such as vital, immigration, and military records.

Vital Records. Death certificates are a good place to start, as they often provide birth date and place, occupation, spouse's name, and parents' names. With this information, you can then look for birth and marriage records to learn more about your ancestor's life.

Religious & Cemetery Records. In many cases, religious institutions are the only source of early vital information such as births (*baptisms*), marriages, and deaths (*burials*).

City Directories. These yearly directories help establish where a person lived at a certain point in time, and can help pinpoint when someone moved, or the year of death. Occupation is often listed as well.

For more information on these and other records & resources, visit the Grosvenor Room website:

<https://www.buffalolib.org/special-collections/guides-publications>

Grosvenor Room • Buffalo & Erie County Public Library • 1 Lafayette Square • Buffalo, NY 14203

Genealogy Handbooks & Guides

A genealogy “how-to” book defines the types of records and methods used for family history research.

Some circulating books in the Grosvenor Room:

CS 9 .S65 2023

Generation by Generation: A Modern Approach to the Basics of Genealogy / Smith, Drew

CS16 .E43 2018

Research Like a Pro: A Genealogist's Guide / Dyer, Nicole

CS21 .B48 2019

The Family Tree Guide to DNA Testing and Genetic Genealogy / Bettinger, Blaine T.

CS 21.3 .E78 2021

DNA for Native American Genealogy / Estes, Roberta

CS 66 .C56 M67 2019

How to Find Your Family History in U.S. Church Records: A Genealogist's Guide / Morton, Sunny Jane

Some circulating books in the Central Library's Nonfiction Department:

CS16 .B457 2018

The Family Tree Toolkit / Berry, Kenyatta

CS16 .M674 2023

Finding Your Family Tree: A Beginner's Guide to Researching Your Genealogy / Morgan, Sharon Leslie

CS49 .H34 2018

Family Tree Factbook: Key Genealogy Tips and Stats for the Busy Researcher / Haddad, Diane

For more books, search the online catalog: https://bepl.ent.sirsi.net/client/en_US/default

Family History Periodicals

- Family Tree Magazine • The New York Researcher • NGS Magazine • Searchers • The Western New York Genealogist

Websites to Help You Get Started

Beginners on Cyndi's List – <https://www.cyndislist.com/beginners/>

Buffalo & Erie County Public Library Genealogy Classes – <https://grosvenorroom.wordpress.com/events/>

Family History for Beginners on the FamilySearch Wiki – https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Family_History_for_Beginners

Genealogy Websites List by the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library – <https://www.buffalolib.org/genealogy/genealogy-websites>

Online Genealogy Records by Location by FamilySearch –

https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Online_Genealogy_Records_by_Location

The Source: A Guidebook to American Genealogy –

https://wiki.rootsweb.com/wiki/index.php/The_Source:_A_Guidebook_to_American_Genealogy