

Top 10 Tips for Beginning Your Family History Research

1. **Start with yourself and work backwards** (e.g., parents, grandparents). Write down what you already know about your family. You can use charts such as ancestral charts and family group sheets, which are available to download on Ancestry.com and elsewhere online, or you can create an online family tree at FamilySearch.org, MyHeritage.com, Ancestry.com, or WikiTree.com. Compare options here: <https://familyhistorydaily.com/genealogy-help-and-how-to/best-family-tree-software/>
2. **Interview your relatives.** When you have recorded as much as you know about your family, talk to your relatives for additional information. You might discover that others have already researched branches of your family tree. Prepare questions to ask, but also be sensitive to others' reluctance to share information and desire for privacy.
3. **Develop an organization method.** Whether using pencil and paper or a software program, you need to organize your information. Find a method that works for you and adhere to it. Get great tips on FamilySearch.org at https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Organize_Your_Genealogy or on Pinterest at <https://www.pinterest.com/familytreemag/genealogy-organization/>
4. **Maintain a focus.** It is incredibly easy to become distracted (and quickly overwhelmed) when researching, especially as you find more information about your family. Focusing on one individual or family at a time, however, helps you stay organized and motivated. Set short and long-term goals.
5. **Search census records.** Through sites such as Ancestry, Familysearch.org, and MyHeritage.com, you can easily search federal and state census records from 1790 to 1940. Beginning in 1850, you can learn the names of everyone in a particular household, their ages, and where they were born. This will help you clarify the identities of the people you are researching.
6. **Collect vital records (e.g., birth, marriage, death).** Websites such as Ancestry make it easy to locate vital records for your ancestors. You may also want to check the websites of state libraries and genealogical and historical societies for the counties in which your ancestors died or were born or married.
7. **Connect with others (e.g., social media, genealogical societies, message boards, LDS family history centers).** Joining a local, state, or national genealogical society, such as the National Genealogical Society (<http://www.ngsgenealogy.org/>) or the Ohio Genealogical Society (<https://www.ogs.org/>) (or other state societies), is a great way to connect with fellow researchers and learn how to improve your research skills. Also consider visiting your local Family History Center (https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Category:Ohio_Family_History_Centers) or connecting on social media to sites such as Cyndi's List (<http://www.cyndislist.com/>).

8. **Document and verify your sources.** Just because you've found it doesn't mean it's true or accurate. Don't rely on just one source. Be sure to verify names, dates, and places using a variety of sources. Document as you go. Consult Evidence! Citation and Analysis for the Family Historian (1997) by Elizabeth Shown Mills or Mastering Genealogical Documentation (2017) by Thomas W. Jones.
9. **Consider various spellings of surnames.** Many reasons exist to explain why the spelling of a surname varies from record to record. Think of the different ways in which a surname could be spelled, including phonetically, and then search accordingly.
10. **Be persistent.** If at first you don't succeed, keep trying. Some people spend years trying to find information about their ancestors. For various reasons, some information may never be located, but before you give up, use a variety of sources, be creative, and enlist professional help if needed. Above all, have fun!