



## Getting Started in Genealogical Research

By Betty Jo Stockton for the Central Florida Genealogical Society

### Start at home

1. Write down all that you know about yourself and your family.
  - a. Start with a Pedigree Chart to record your information. Pedigree Charts are available free at the West Oaks Genealogy Center or at the Family History Centers of the LDS Church or as a free download from various genealogical websites. Or you can start creating a pedigree chart at Ancestry.com or other online sites.
  - b. Create a Family Group Sheet for yourself, your parents, your grandparents and each of your married siblings. Record where you got each piece of information — even if it is “personal knowledge.”
2. Gather any records you have relating to your family. Look for birth or death certificates, Bible records, newspaper articles, letters, photographs, etc. Be sure that each is labeled as to where it came from and, in the case of photographs, who the people are (full names, dates, and location.) Make copies for your files, scan to your computer, and store the originals in a safe place.
3. Question your immediate family members. Ask them to tell you what they know of the family, to gather documents or memorabilia they might have and to give you names of others who might have more information.

### Work backwards from yourself

1. Keep a pedigree chart to record each generation behind you. Start a free tree on Ancestry.com
2. Be sure to find out all you can about your ancestors and all their siblings. Your ancestor’s brothers and sisters had the same parents your ancestors did and may have left a better paper trail.

### Expand your search

1. Check with extended family members as to what they might have to help in your search. You never know what your parents or grandparents may have stored in a attic. Or your elderly aunt may remember. Ask the same questions more than once. Listen to the stories for clues for further research.
2. Interview (preferably on audio or video) your older family members. Ask not only about their family but also about their experiences.
3. Check with neighbors or friends who knew your ancestors; they may have photographs or stories that include your family.
4. Write or email vital records offices for birth and death certificate of your family members. There are many clues to be found there. (Vital records were kept in the county where the event happened, not where they lived.)

### Organize what you find

1. Put the information you’ve gathered into a format that is organized and easy to use. Be sure to record names, places, dates and the source of your information.
  - a. If you’re using a computer, enter the data into one of the many genealogy software programs or online trees. Print out Family Group Sheets and Pedigree Charts and have family members fill them out.
  - b. If you are working by hand, continue to fill out Family Group Sheets for each family unit you find. Use Pedigree Charts to help show relationships. These can be created in trees online or in genealogy software.
2. Keep a record of where you’ve looked, what you’ve found, and when. Many genealogy programs include a Research Log or you can find them on the internet or in most beginners’ genealogy books.
3. Keep a list of what you still need to know - a “To do” list.

### Take a DNA Test to help you find relatives

1. Ancestry.com has the largest database of autosomal DNA tests.
2. FamilyTree DNA tests Y-DNA (males only), mtDNA, and autosomal DNA. [www.familytreedna.com](http://www.familytreedna.com)

### Visit your local library

1. The Orange County Public Library has a Genealogy Center located at the West Oaks Library in Ocoee. Check their website < <https://www.ocls.info/locations-hours/west-oaks-branch>> At the Center, you will want to check:
  - a. Census records - They also have a subscription to Ancestry Library edition which has all the census years indexed and with digitized images of the census. Heritage Quest is also available through local libraries with access from home. It has census images for all the federal census records - and is indexed by head of household.
  - b. Family history books on your family name.
  - c. Books and periodicals on the area in which your ancestor ancestors lived.
  - d. Passenger lists for your immigrant ancestors.
2. The LDS (Mormon) Church maintains Family History Centers in most towns worldwide. Volunteers there will help you get started and show how to access the massive amount of information that has been preserved. The Orlando Family History Center is at 45 East Par St. They are open Thursday and Saturday from 9:30 – 1:30. For more locations: <https://www.familysearch.org/locations/>

### Join a genealogical society - or two

1. Join the genealogical society in the area where you live. You'll find interesting programs and informative periodicals as well as the company of others who share your interests. The local organization is Central Florida Genealogical Society <[www.cfgs.org](http://www.cfgs.org)>.
2. Join the genealogical society in the area where your ancestors lived. Put a query in the newsletter of that group asking for information on your ancestors. Find a society by Googling the area/county and add the work "genealogical society."

### Using the clues you've gathered, go to the area where your ancestors lived —

1. In person – Check local vital records, courthouse records, cemeteries, libraries, churches, local history groups and genealogical societies.
2. Call or email – Write to the local courthouse, cemetery, library, churches, local history group and genealogical societies. Find addresses at the library or in genealogy reference books.
3. On the internet — Search for others with your surname or search for information from the localities where your family lived. Good starting places are:
  - a. Cyndi's List - <[www.cyndislist.com](http://www.cyndislist.com)>
  - b. FamilySearch (LDS) - <[www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)>
  - c. RootsWeb - <[www.rootsweb.com](http://www.rootsweb.com)>
  - d. Ancestry - <[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)>
  - e. USGenWeb - <[www.usgenweb.com](http://www.usgenweb.com)>
  - f. Find A Grave - <[www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com)>
  - g. Location or surname groups Search on: <<https://groups.io>>
  - h. Facebook — search for a county or state or a surname and add the word genealogy

### Look for other living descendants of your ancestors

1. Follow up on clues to descendants of your ancestor's siblings — they may have information you need.
2. Use the internet or local phone directories to locate others of your surname to contact. On the internet, you might try <[www.switchboard.com](http://www.switchboard.com)>. Local libraries have phone directories for many places. Write, phone or visit anyone who might help.
3. Look for records that add depth to your ancestor's life: land records, diaries, letters, town histories, family stories, wills, county histories, etc. Make your ancestors come alive by gathering more than just names and dates.

### Enjoy the search

1. Take the time to create a scrapbook, preserve the photographs, and record the stories of your family, perhaps in an online blog.
2. Share your findings with your family - especially the children who never knew your grandparents or aunts and uncles.

