

The Genealogy of Your Family. A Starting Place.

We suspect that you are in our library for the reason that you know or have hints that some of your people lived in our county or in a neighboring county. Our collection will help you.

This short paper is not intended to do other than assist you in commencing or moving ahead with your research within this pleasurable and rewarding hobby. Hopefully, here you will gain some ideas, a direction by which to move ahead, and a measure of “how-to”. Our collection of local sources will help you. So, get aboard and enjoy the trip.

We think it is critical to your success that you buy a genealogical instruction book as soon as convenient. Genealogy is not difficult, yet does require some knowledge of what others of us have learned over the centuries. Our library has several of such books of a general nature, and you need but ask the reference clerk and she will help. To fail to consider and examine such writings will almost surely cause you to waste weeks or months of valuable research time; we have already invented the genealogical wheel, and you need not repeat that effort.

Your easiest and first fundamental goals are two (2) in number, after which it will be time to fill in the wonderful stories of the lives of those who went before you. Those two first goals, with our collection and all those future collections you may explore, are a) to start with the few facts concerning family members about which you have some certainty. By searching those names in the TN censuses backwards from 1930, you likely will find one or more of those people. b) When you find those folks, you will also learn of the counties (or towns) in which those families resided on the dates of the censuses. Those are their all important “wheres”.

Those “wheres” are perhaps the most important of the facts you will learn and should be carefully noted for your future use. Why? Because, as is politics, genealogy is LOCAL. Probably 95% of the records of your life were made and stored in the county and town where you resided – those “wheres”. That will be true for any and all of your ancestors. Recall, if you will, that the records of your birth, Social Security registration, schools, marriages, automobile purchases, voting registrations (both local and National), any and all land or homes you bought or sold, any and all crimes, legal proceedings and juries upon which you served, registrations as school teachers, professionals and druggists that early were required, your recorded wills, military enlistments and discharges, all memberships in patriotic organizations such as American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans for both men and women such as the D.A.R., S.A.R., C.A.R., S.R., S.C.V., S.U.V., Ladies of 1812, many ladies’ social groups and auxiliaries, Masons, Odd Fellows, Elks, Eagles, Moose, Labor Unions, employment records.

Then too, there are local records of Rail Road Retirement Act awards and retirement, institutional commitments, your death, death certificate, Social Security actions resulting from your death or that of your spouse and children, cemetery records, any and all estate proceeding in which you were a party, all public sales and purchases brought on by death of you and your family, and many more records required locally and recorded in offices of county, local and city government.

As to virtually all of those records and entries, there are no repositories other than local facilities and occasionally at offices of state government. It is critical that you notice that VERY few of those records are yet on the Internet. Why? Because very, very few of that totality of sources have been published and made available, even locally, and surely not at any internet, society or library sources. By the way, we recommend that you join and pay for NO records, except memberships in societies and pertinent books) till later and after you have learned more about what you may need.

The most recent census open to you is 1930, so to work back from there, you must ask questions of your family concerning who lived where in that year, go to the census, locate that person or family, and then work backwards in the censuses taken every ten years since 1790. So, if you keep in mind that the “where” is a must for your research, you will move ahead with relative ease. Such records will be found in the local libraries, archives/museums, city offices, and county courthouses. Notice that “local” requires that you must do your best to examine those local records, as well as in the immediately surrounding towns and counties. To so search is more than critical.

So where do you start; what first to do? The Internet? As you now know, nope. In books or indices about that family name? Nope. What your Grandmother told you? Nope, unless she gave you some “wheres”. So, how then? Begin by writing down the full names of your parents and grandparents and, where possible, your great grand-parents. Then, once again, try to determine the places where they lived and when they lived there, since with that data you will know in what counties in the censuses and records you will need to investigate.

Though perhaps but little, virtually every one of your relatives will have some knowledge that will help you, and sometimes you will gain MANY facts that will move your search ahead by many steps. Why folks fail in making those contacts is difficult to understand, since those contacts will save many hours of work. So, do that, even if you have strained relationships with some of your relatives. Just as you would provide relatives with the information you have, so too will they help you. So, CALL them, and always make notes of what you learn. Still again, when they provide any information, always ask “where” the events took place.

Too many folks leap to their computers, plug in a name and see what comes on the screen. When in your early searches you fall prey to that urge, you need to know that the Internet has less than 5% of the records available for your search. So, even if you were to search and read every entry on the net (and you can't), many, many more of the records available to you simply are NOT available other than locally. Remember also that much of the information you do find on the net or casually written by researchers is misleading, if not flat wrong. That said, Internet efforts will help a bit now and then, even though you will search for days only to find that thousands of people have lived over the centuries and carried the same surnames that you seek. By all means, if you have extra time for such searching, do so and there seek the censuses and “wheres”, as well as other facts specific to your family that you come upon.

Looking in indices and noting everybody carrying the same or similar names found in your family will be all but worthless to you as you move ahead and find better and more precise information. Know too that there are no such things as “clues”; if any facts you find in any way tend to establish a relationship, then that information is to be considered “evidence” tending toward ultimate “proof”.

Then too, the web is a valuable first tool for learning what sources you must examine. On the net, you will find censuses and the vast resources of the U.S. Govt., the LDS Church (Mormons) in Salt Lake City, our own and many of the bigger libraries that have posted what records those organization have. Next, go to the web pages for the counties of your “wheres”. How? Suppose you know that your Grandmother was born and married at Asheville (Buncombe County), NC. Type the words “Asheville NC genealogy” into your browser or in Google. There you will find many local sources and small societies which will prove invaluable for research. Why? Because local libraries and genealogy researchers know more about local sources, their counties and areas than do any other sources or people.

Perhaps most importantly, those local; societies know and reveal in their newsletters and communications which of their records have been published, especially locally, and are available within their facilities or elsewhere. They have been to all the places in that “where” which may be helpful for you, probably have photos and cemetery record, usually have birth, marriage, and legal matters, and very often have death records. Those local searchers have been in that courthouse, library, and offices of government, and have spent many hours discussing the exact area in which your ancestors lived. You MUST exhaust those sources; nobody knows more than do they.

So, the county and city web pages will be a goldmine for you, just as those have been for all of us. You should make every effort to follow up in those county and city records, visit there or plan a vacation to that area, join the inexpensive local societies in order that you exchange ideas with folks who have information that you need, read their little newsletters and always ask with your own “queries” about specific ancestors and other members who may be searching ancestors you share with them, and – for sure - make friends with those folks. They are closer to the records you need than are any other persons or groups on Earth.

Good luck, and, though we can not do your research for you, we will help with information and directions to our library sources.

Thanks for visiting with us!!

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