

Every Branch Has A Story

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO STARTING YOUR
FAMILY HISTORY WITH CONFIDENCE



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You're holding something powerful: the beginning of a journey into the past that is entirely your own.

Maybe you're here because you're curious. Maybe you want to honor the people who came before you. Maybe you're hoping to preserve stories, records, and memories for the people who come after you. Whatever brought you here, welcome.

There is no perfect way to begin family history research. You do not need to be an expert. You just need to be curious, willing to pay attention, and ready to start with what you know.

This guide was created to be a warm, clear, and practical companion for your first steps into genealogy. Inside, we'll help you reflect on your why, organize what you already know, begin capturing stories and memories, and lay a strong foundation for whatever comes next.

Take your time. You're doing something meaningful.

May you always find yourself in the stories of those who came before you,

Jessica and Lisa
Co-Founders, Embracing Your History



Discover Your “Why”

Every meaningful journey begins with a reason.

Before you start searching records or building your family tree, take a moment to reflect on why this matters to you. Your “why” will guide your research, shape your decisions, and keep you grounded when things get complicated or emotional.

There’s no right or wrong answer here. You might be here out of curiosity, a sense of connection, a desire to preserve something meaningful, or even a question you’ve carried for years.

Take your time. Be honest. This is for you.

1) What first sparked your interest in your family history?

2) What questions are you hoping to answer?

3) Who are you doing this for? Yourself, your family, future generations?

4) What do you hope this journey will teach you about yourself?

5) What stories, values, or connections are you hoping to uncover?

6) Is there a specific person, place, or mystery you feel drawn to?

What You Know: Start With You

In genealogy, we always begin with what we know and that means starting with you. That might feel surprising at first. Maybe you're excited to jump straight to your great-great-grandparents, immigration stories, or that mystery relative you've heard about for years. It's tempting to start in the past, but strong research doesn't begin with guesses; it begins with something solid. That solid starting point is your own life.

Building your family tree is like putting together a puzzle: the pieces fit best if you start with the edges and work inward. In genealogy, you are the first piece that helps all the others connect. Think of your family history like a thread. You are not separate from the story; you are part of it. When you begin with yourself, you create a clear, steady path that connects everything that comes next. Starting with yourself creates a solid foundation. From there, you can move backward one generation at a time, using documents, records, and stories to guide the way and build your history carefully and accurately.

Skipping ahead might feel faster, but it often leads to confusion, incorrect connections, and stories that don't quite fit. So we start here. With **you**. With what you know and what you can verify.

Let's begin with your story. Write down as much as you can. Don't worry about getting everything perfect. This is your starting point.

Include:

- Your full name (and any nicknames you've used)
- Your full birth date and place (City, County, State, Country)

Then move to your parents:

- Their full names
- Birth, marriage, and death information (if applicable)
- Locations for each of those events

Then your grandparents:

- Full names
- Any known birth, marriage, and death details
- Dates and places whenever possible
-

Don't worry if you don't know everything right away. Write down what you can remember or ask a family member to help you fill in the blanks. You can always update things as you learn more.



Pro Tip: Date Format Matters

In genealogy, we write dates in the day/month/year format, like 10 August 1922, instead of the typical U.S. style. This makes your records clearer and easier to read internationally, especially when sharing your research with others or using global databases.

- U.S. Format: 8/10/1922 (Could mean August 10 or October 8)
- Genealogy Format: 10 August 1922 (No confusion!)

If you're in the U.S., this might take a little getting used to, but it's worth it. Think of it as speaking the international language of family history!

Every detail you write down here becomes a thread you can follow later.

Your full name: _____

Date and place of birth: _____

Father's full name: _____

Father's date and place of birth: _____

Father's date and place of death: _____

Mother's full name: _____

Mother's date and place of birth: _____

Mother's date and place of death: _____

Date and place of marriage: _____

Once you've documented all the vital information for a person, they should have an entry in your records that looks something like this:

EXAMPLE: _____

Mary Jane Sullivan

Birth Date: 10 August 1922

Place of Birth: Batavia, Clermont Co., Ohio, USA

Death Date: 25 July 2010

Place of Death: Amelia, Clermont Co., Ohio, USA

Marriage Date: 8 August 1944

Place of Marriage: St. Peter's Catholic Church,
New Richmond, Clermont Co., Ohio, USA

Spouse Name: John Henry Morgenstern

Paternal Grandparents

Grandfather's full name:

Grandfather's date and place of birth:

Grandfather's date and place of death:

Grandmother's full name:

Grandmother's date and place of birth:

Grandmother's date and place of death:

Date and place of Grandparent's marriage:

Maternal Grandparents

Grandfather's full name:

Grandfather's date and place of birth:

Grandfather's date and place of death:

Grandmother's full name:

Grandmother's date and place of birth:

Grandmother's date and place of death:

Date and place of Grandparent's marriage:

Use the space below to capture any other vital facts you want to reference later.



Pro Tip: Recording Names with Respect and Clarity

In genealogy, it's traditional to list people by the names they were given or used **at birth**, especially for tracking family lines across generations. For example, women are typically listed by their **maiden names**, the surname they had before marriage, to preserve those connections.

However, we recognize that names and identities are deeply personal and may change over time and for a variety of reasons. This includes people who are transgender, nonbinary, or who have chosen a different name that reflects who they truly are.

Our suggestion:

When creating your records, include both the name someone was **given at birth** and the name they **lived or identified with**, especially if they changed it later in life. For relatives who are still living, we recommend asking them how they'd like to be listed in your research records and letting them know that you'll still make a private note of both names solely for the sake of telling their story accurately and with respect.

Example:

James Lee Smith (list in your notes: born Jennifer Marie Davis)

Elizabeth Anne Carter (nee Johnson)

Names are complicated and personal. Just document thoroughly and with care.

It's always better to write down more details than less. Include birth names, chosen names, nicknames, and name changes and dates when you can. These notes may be the breadcrumbs someone else needs to follow the story. Doing so makes sure your family history stays accurate **and** respectful. Good genealogy honors both accuracy and humanity.



"A person's name is to [them] the sweetest and most important sound in any language."

--Dale Carnegie

Ready To Dig A Little Deeper?

So far, you've captured names, dates, and places. These form the foundation of your family history. Genealogy is more than a collection of facts, though. The heart of family history lives in the stories, traditions, and memories that bring those names to life. This is where things begin to feel real. The way someone laughed, the meals your family made, the stories told over and over again. These details may not always appear in official records, but they are just as important.

Use the following pages to begin capturing what you remember, what you've been told, and what you're curious about.

What stories, traditions, or sayings did you grow up hearing?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

This image shows a full page of blank, lined paper. It features approximately 20 evenly spaced horizontal grey lines across its entire width, providing a template for handwriting practice or general note-taking. The margins are consistent on all sides.

What questions have you always had about your family? Is there something you've never fully understood or something you wish you knew more about?

This image shows a full page of blank white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a template for writing or drawing. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

Are there any photos, objects, or family heirlooms that have made you curious? What do you notice about them?

This image shows a full page of blank white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a template for writing or drawing. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

Why This Step Matters

This step might seem simple, but it's one of the most powerful things you can do in your family history journey. When you take the time to write down what you already know, you're laying the very first stone in the path that will connect you to generations past, and to those who will come after you. By starting with yourself, you create something real and lasting: a personal record that says, "I was here. This is where the story continues." You're honoring both your ancestors and your own place in the family line.

Even if it feels like you don't know much yet, that's okay. Every name, every date, every memory you capture now is a seed that can grow into something bigger over time. And remember, **this isn't about getting everything perfect**. It's about honoring what's in your heart and memory right now. It's about giving yourself permission to begin, even if some pieces are missing or unclear.

Family history is a journey. It's okay to start small. It's okay to have questions.

The important thing is that you start.

Once you've written down the basics like names, dates, and places, you've started on the journey. Genealogy isn't just about building a tree full of names and dates, though. The real heart of family history lives in the stories, traditions, and memories that give those names life. That's why it's so important to look beyond the facts and start capturing the experiences that shaped your family.

One of the best ways to do this is by talking with the people who are still here today. Living relatives are living libraries of stories, lore, and information. Every conversation is a chance to preserve details, emotions, and memories that might be otherwise lost.

Why does gathering stories matter? There are many reasons, but among those are:

- **Memories fade over time.** If we don't capture them now, some stories may disappear with the people who told them.
- **Oral histories add richness and humanity** to what might otherwise just be a name and a date on a chart.
 - **Family traditions and cultural practices** often aren't written down anywhere. They live in the hearts and habits of each generation.
- **Hearing firsthand accounts** makes history feel personal, real, and connected to your own life.
- **Preserving voices for future generations** honors those who came before us and creates a priceless legacy.

What to Capture from Living Relatives

When gathering family traditions, oral histories, or memories, think about collecting:

- **Stories** about everyday life, important events, holidays, or funny moments
- **Family recipes**, especially those tied to holidays or cultural traditions
- **Songs, sayings, or family “inside jokes”** passed down over generations
- **Celebrations and rituals**, like weddings, births, coming-of-age traditions, or religious practices
- **Migrations or moves**, and reasons for them (e.g., immigration stories, moves across states or countries)
- **Occupations and skills**, especially trades or talents passed down through generations.
- **Life advice or lessons** that relatives often shared

These details might seem small, but over time they weave together a beautiful, textured history of your family's life and values.

Think about what questions you may have about the traditions and culture of your family. What family traditions have you grown up with? Do you know how those started or why? Are there foods, songs, or celebrations tied to your family or culture? What parts of your heritage do you want to learn more about?

Use the space below to capture some of those thoughts and questions.

Questions to Ask Relatives



Use questions like these as starting points for conversations. Let the discussions be natural. Sometimes one question leads to unexpected and wonderful stories!

Family Traditions

- What holidays were most important in your family? How did you celebrate them?
- Are there any recipes that have been passed down? Who taught you how to make them?
- Were there any special traditions for birthdays, weddings, or funerals?

Childhood Memories

- Where did you grow up? What was your home like?
- What games did you play as a child?
- Who were your childhood heroes?

Work and Daily Life

- What jobs did you have? What was your first job?
- What did a typical day look like for you growing up?
- What skills, hobbies, or talents were important to your family?

Community and Relationships

Who were the people your family was closest to growing up?
What did neighbors or community life look like where you lived?
Were there any family friendships or feuds you remember?

Want more guidance?

For a complete set of thoughtfully designed interview questions and guidance, download:

The Stories in Our Roots: A Family History Interview Guide

Available at:

www.embracingyourhistory.com



Research Mindset: How to Approach This Work



Before you begin searching for records or building out your family tree, it's important to understand how to approach genealogy. This isn't just about finding names and dates; it's about understanding people, relationships, and the context of their lives.

That takes time, care, and a willingness to slow down. If you approach this work with the right mindset from the beginning, everything that comes next will be clearer and more meaningful.

Start with curiosity, not urgency

It's natural to want answers quickly, especially if you're trying to solve a family mystery or fill in missing pieces, but genealogy isn't a race. The goal isn't to build your tree as fast as possible. The goal is to build it *accurately*. Let yourself be curious. Follow the story and take one step at a time.

Expect Complexity

Records don't always agree. Names change. Dates are inconsistent. People move, remarry, disappear, and reappear in unexpected places. Courthouses burn down. ***This is normal.***

When something doesn't make sense, it doesn't necessarily mean you're doing it wrong. It means you've found something worth looking at more closely.

Stories and records both matter

Family stories are powerful, but they aren't always complete or fully accurate. Some of them might even be completely made up! Records can provide evidence, but they don't always tell the whole story. Good genealogy holds both the stories people passed down and the records that help confirm, expand, or sometimes challenge them.

You don't have to figure everything out at once

You are not expected to solve your entire family history in one sitting. Your family history is never really "done". There's always a new story to uncover. Start with one person, one question, one step. Progress in genealogy happens over time, not all at once.

A simple guiding principle: Slow down. Stay curious. Look for evidence.

The Records That Tell Your Story

The foundation of genealogy isn't just names. It's the records that connect them. As you move from memory into research, you'll begin working with records. You don't need everything at once. You don't need to be an expert. However, understanding what kinds of records exist and what they can tell you will make your research clearer, more accurate, and far more meaningful.

Most genealogy research is built on a set of core record types. Each one offers a different piece of the story: names, relationships, locations, and context. You don't need to use all of these at once. Start with one and build from there.

Vital Records:

Birth, marriage, and death records form the foundation of your research.

They help confirm:

- names
- dates
- relationships
- locations

These are often the most reliable starting points when available.

Census Records:

Census records provide snapshots of families over time.

They can show:

- where someone lived
- who was in their household
- occupations
- ages and family structure

Following someone through multiple census years can help you track how their life has changed over time.

Church Records:

Before civil records were widely kept, churches often recorded key life events.

These may include:

- baptisms
- marriages
- burials

Church records can be especially valuable when birth or death records are missing.

Newspapers and Obituaries:

Newspapers and obituaries can add depth and personality to your family history in a way that few other records can.

They may include:

- birth, marriage, and death announcements
- obituaries with family relationships listed
- local news stories or community involvement
- milestones like anniversaries, graduations, or achievements

Obituaries, in particular, can help connect generations by naming:

- spouses
- children
- siblings
- parents

Newspapers can also provide context—what was happening in the community at the time, how people lived, and how they were remembered. These records are especially helpful for filling in gaps and bringing stories to life beyond names and dates.

Military Records:

Military records can provide insight into an ancestor's service and, often, their life beyond it.

They may include:

- enlistment or draft information
- service dates and locations
- rank and unit details
- pension records
- physical descriptions

In some cases, military records can also reveal:

- next of kin
- place of residence at the time of service
- movements across regions or countries

These records can help you understand not only where someone was, but also what they experienced during their lifetime.

Immigration and Naturalization Records:

If your ancestors moved from one country to another, immigration and naturalization records can help you trace that journey.

These records may include:

- passenger lists
- ports of departure and arrival
- country of origin
- dates of immigration
- naturalization papers

Some records may also include:

- names of family members traveling together
- last known residence
- destination or sponsor in the new country

These documents can help you connect your family to a specific place of origin and better understand the path they took to build a new life.

Land and Probate Records:

Land and probate records can provide valuable insight into property, wealth, and family relationships.

These records may include:

- land deeds and property transfers
- wills and estate documents
- inventories of belongings
- records of inheritance

Probate records, in particular, can help identify:

- spouses
- children
- extended family members

They may also offer a glimpse into a person's daily life through the items they owned and passed down.

These records can be especially useful when other records are limited, helping you piece together relationships and timelines.

Each of these records offers a different piece of the story. Some confirm facts. Some add context. Some reveal entirely new paths to explore. You don't need to use all of them at once. Start with one. Follow what you find. Let each record guide you to the next step.

How to Search Without Getting Overwhelmed

At this point, you've been introduced to the kinds of records that tell your family's story. Now comes the part that can feel exciting and, sometimes, a little overwhelming: Starting the search.

It's easy to open a database, type in a name, and begin clicking through results. Before long, you may have dozens of records open, multiple tabs running, and a growing sense that you're not quite sure what connects to what. If that happens, you're not doing anything wrong. You're just missing a simple structure. Genealogy becomes much clearer and far more rewarding when you approach it one step at a time.

Start With a Question

Every search should begin with a clear, focused question. Not, "I want to build my entire family tree", but

- "When and where was my grandmother born?"
- "Who were my great-grandfather's parents?"
- "Where was this family living in 1940?"

A clear question gives your research direction. It helps you decide which records to look for, where to search, and what counts as a useful result. If you're not sure what to search for next, come back to your question.

Use What You Already Know

You've already done important work by writing down names, dates, and places. Now, use that information as your starting point. Even if it's incomplete, it's enough.

You can search using:

- a full or partial name
- an approximate date
- a known location

Small details can lead to meaningful discoveries. You don't need perfect information to begin.

Expect Variation (and Be Flexible)

Records are created by people—and people make mistakes.

You may encounter:

- misspelled names
- incorrect ages
- inconsistent dates
- unexpected locations

This is normal. If you don't find what you're looking for right away, try alternate spellings, initials instead of full names, or searching by location without a full name. Flexibility is part of the process.

One Record at a Time

It can be tempting to gather as much information as possible all at once. Instead, slow down. Start with a single record:

- a birth record
- a census entry
- an obituary

Take a moment to read it carefully.

Ask:

- What does this tell me?
- What new information do I now have?
- What question does this answer and what new question does it create?

Then move to the next step. Each record builds on the last.

Follow the Clues

Genealogy is not about random searching—it's about following evidence. Let each discovery guide your next search. You don't have to plan everything ahead of time. You just need to pay attention to what you find.

Know When to Pause

If you find yourself clicking through record after record without reading them closely, saving information without understanding how it connects, or feeling unsure or overwhelmed, that's your signal to pause. Step away from the search for a moment. Come back to your original question or the last record you confirmed to be accurate. Then begin again—slowly and intentionally.

A Simple Guiding Approach

When in doubt, return to this:

- Start with a question
- Use what you know
- Look for one record
- Read it carefully
- Follow the next clue

That's it. You don't need to do everything at once. You just need to take the next step.

What Not To Do (And Why It Matters)

As you begin researching, it's easy to feel pulled in a dozen directions at once. One record leads to another, hints begin appearing everywhere, and before long, you may find yourself adding names and saving information faster than you can fully process it. This happens to almost everyone when they first start genealogy research. The good news is that a few careful habits from the beginning can help you avoid confusion, reduce mistakes, and build a family history you can trust with confidence over time.

Don't Copy Other People's Trees

Online family trees can be helpful, but they are not always accurate.

It's common to find:

- missing information
- incorrect relationships
- completely different families connected by mistake

When you copy someone else's tree without verifying it, you also copy their errors.

Instead:

- Use other trees as hints or leads
- Look for the records that support the information
- Build your tree based on evidence, not assumptions

Your goal isn't to build the biggest tree; it's to build a correct one.

Don't Accept Every Hint Automatically

Many genealogy platforms provide "hints" to suggest possible records or connections. These can be useful, but they are not always right.

Before accepting a hint, take a moment to check:

- Do the dates match what you already know?
- Is the location consistent?
- Do the relationships make sense?

If something feels slightly off, pause and look closer. Hints are starting points—not answers.

Don't Skip Generations

It's tempting to jump backward, especially when you see a name that looks familiar or a tree that goes further than yours. But skipping steps often leads to attaching the wrong people. Instead, move carefully; confirm one generation, then move to the next. Think of it like building a foundation. Each layer needs to be stable before adding another.

Don't Rely on a Single Record

One record can be helpful, but it rarely tells the full story.

For example:

- Ages in census records can vary
- Names may be recorded differently
- Details can be incomplete or incorrect

Good research looks for patterns across multiple records. When possible, try to confirm information using at least two sources and consistent details across records. The more pieces that align, the more confident you can be.

Don't Save Everything Without Understanding It

It's easy to start collecting records quickly, especially when everything feels new and interesting. But saving large amounts of information without reviewing it carefully can create confusion later.

Before you save something, ask:

- Do I know who this person is?
- Does this connect clearly to my family?
- What does this record actually tell me?

Taking a moment now can save you a lot of time later.

Don't Ignore Conflicting Information

At some point, you will find records that don't agree. A birth date may differ, a name may be spelled differently, or a location may not match. This is normal.

When that happens:

- Don't ignore the difference
- Don't pick one at random

Instead, make a note of it. Conflicting information is often a sign that you need more records or you've found something worth investigating more closely.

Genealogy isn't about finding perfect answers, it's about working through real, sometimes messy, human records.

A Simple Reminder:

You don't have to get everything right the first time. Mistakes happen. Details change. New information comes to light.

What matters most is this:

- Move slowly
- Stay curious
- Look for evidence

That's how strong, meaningful research is built.

Staying Organized From the Start

As you begin researching, you'll start finding more than you expected. A name leads to a record, a record leads to a new detail, and that detail leads to another search. Before long, you may have multiple records open, notes written in different places, and details you don't quite remember how you found. This is a normal part of genealogy, but without a simple system, it can quickly become overwhelming. The goal isn't to be perfectly organized. The goal is to keep your work clear, trackable, and easy to return to.



Keep Track of What You Search

Every time you look for something, you're doing valuable work, even if you don't find what you were hoping for. Start getting in the habit of writing down who you were researching, what you were trying to find, where you looked, and what you found (or didn't find). This helps you avoid repeating the same searches and remember what you've already tried.

Choose a Simple System

You don't need anything complicated or fancy. Start with what feels easiest for you, whether that's a notebook, a digital document, or a basic spreadsheet. There's no single "right" system. What matters is a system that works for you and that you can use consistently and understand when you come back to it later. Simple and consistent will always work better than complex and unused.

Save What You Find

When you locate a record, take a moment to save it properly. Whenever possible, download or save the image, record where it came from, and note the date you accessed it. This allows you to return to the record later, verify your work, thoroughly cite your source, and share your findings with others. If you rely only on memory or bookmarks, important details can get lost.

Keep Information Connected

As you collect records and notes, try to keep related information together.

For example:

- group records by person or family
- keep notes tied to specific individuals
- store documents in clearly labeled folders

This makes it much easier to follow a line of research and understand how pieces connect.

Don't Wait Until It's Complicated

It's much easier to stay organized from the beginning than to fix things later. Even a simple system used early will save your time in the long run and reduce frustration. You don't have to organize everything perfectly, but you do need to pay attention to where your information lives.

A Simple Guiding Approach

If you're not sure where to start, keep it simple:

- Write down what you searched
- Save what you find
- Keep related information together

That's enough. Your system can grow as your research grows.

Your Research Log

One of the most powerful habits you can build in genealogy is keeping a research log. This also does not need to be complicated or perfect. It needs to help you keep track of what you're doing and what you're learning. As you research, you'll be searching in multiple places, revisiting the same names, and following different leads. Without a way to track that work, it's easy to repeat the same searches over and over again, forget where the information you found came from, and lose track of things you've already confirmed. A research log helps you stay organized and work more efficiently.

What to Include in Your Log

Each entry in your research log should capture a single search. You don't need to write a lot, just enough to understand what you did and what happened.

Include:

- The person you are researching
- Question you are trying to answer
- Date of search
- Where you searched (website, archive, etc.)
- What you found
- Notes or next steps

That's it. Simple, clear, and useful.

A Simple Example

Here's what a research log entry might look like:

- Date: March 12, 2026
- Person: Mary Jane Sullivan
- Question: When and where was she born?
- Research Date: March 12, 2026
- Where I searched: 1930 U.S. Census (Ancestry)
- What I found: Listed as age 8, living in Clermont County, Ohio
- Notes / Next Steps: Search for birth record in Ohio around 1922
-

You don't need formal language. You just need enough detail to understand your own work later.



A Note on "No Results"

Sometimes you'll search and find nothing, but that still matters. Recording a "no result" helps you avoid repeating the same search. In genealogy, what you don't find can be just as important as what you do.

Keep It Consistent

Your research log doesn't need to be perfect; it just needs to be used regularly. Try to log your searches as you go, keep entries simple, and stay consistent over time. Even a few entries will start to create a clear picture of your progress.

Use the Template

On the next page, you'll find a simple research log template you can use as you begin your work. You can print it out, fill it in digitally, or recreate it in a format that works for you. There's no single "right" way to use it. The goal is to give you a tool that helps you stay focused, organized, and confident as you move forward.



Research Log

Ancestor's name:

Objective(s):

[illegible]

Your 5-Generation Family Tree

So now you've taken what you know, begun asking questions, and started building a foundation for your family history. Now, it's time to see it come together.

A family tree helps you visualize your work in a clear and meaningful way. It shows how people are connected, where information is complete, and where there are still stories waiting to be uncovered.

Your 5-generation family tree starts with you and moves backward, one generation at a time. As you fill in the chart, include full names, dates (when known), places (when known). You don't need to have every detail. Start with what you know and build from there, and also expect gaps. Leave space for those as well. It's completely normal to have missing information. That's part of the process. Those gaps aren't failures, they're future research opportunities.

Your family tree is not something you complete in one sitting. As you continue researching, you will add new names, fill in those gaps, correct details, and gather evidence proving each connection in your tree. What starts as a simple chart will grow into a more complete picture of your family over time.

As your tree begins to fill in, you may start to notice repeated names across generations, families staying in the same location, patterns of movement or migration, etc. These patterns can guide your next steps and help you better understand your family's story. They're all hints for you to follow.

Your family tree isn't just a collection of names. It's a living record of relationships, lives lived, and the people and stories that came together in order for you to be here. What you're building here is something that can be shared, expanded, and passed on.

On the next page, you'll find a 5-generation family tree template. You can print it and fill it in by hand, complete it digitally, and revisit it and update it as your research grows. There's no single "right" way to use it. The goal is to give you a simple, visual way to track your progress and see your family history take shape.



FIVE-GENERATION ANCESTOR CHART

Chart # _____
1 on this chart = _____ on chart # _____
see chart # _____

1

birth date and place

marriage date and place

death date and place

spouse

2

birth date and place

marriage date and place

death date and place

3

birth date and place

death date and place

4

birth date and place

marriage date and place

death date and place

5

birth date and place

death date and place

6

birth date and place

marriage date and place

death date and place

7

birth date and place

death date and place

8

birth date and place

marriage date and place

place death date and place

9

place

birth date and place

death date and place

10

birth date and place

marriage date and place

place death date and place

11

place

birth date and place

death date and place

12

birth date and place

marriage date and place

place death date and place

13

place

birth date and place

death date and place

14

birth date and place

marriage date and place

place death date and place

15

place

birth date and place

death date and place

16

birth date and place

marriage date and place

place death date and place

17

place

birth date and place

death date and place

18

birth date and place

marriage date and place

place death date and place

19

place

birth date and place

death date and place

20

birth date and place

marriage date and place

place death date and place

21

place

birth date and place

death date and place

22

birth date and place

marriage date and place

place death date and place

23

place

birth date and place

death date and place

24

birth date and place

marriage date and place

place death date and place

25

place

birth date and place

death date and place

26

birth date and place

marriage date and place

place death date and place

27

place

birth date and place

death date and place

28

birth date and place

marriage date and place

place death date and place

29

place

birth date and place

death date and place

30

birth date and place

marriage date and place

place death date and place

31

place

birth date and place

death date and place

29

Putting It All Together

By now, you've learned a lot. You've reflected on your "why", written down what you know, begun capturing stories, explored different types of records, learned how to search, and started organizing your work.

That might feel like a lot of separate pieces, but this is where they come together. Genealogy doesn't happen all at once. It happens in small, connected steps.

Let's walk through what this might look like in practice.

Step 1: Start With a Question

You begin with something simple: When and where was my grandfather born?

Step 2: Use What You Know

From your notes, you already have:

- his name
- an approximate birth year
- the state where he lived

That's enough to begin.

Step 3: Search for a Record

You decide to start with a census record. You search using his name, estimated age, and known location. You find a possible match in the 1940 census.

Step 4: Read the Record Carefully

Instead of moving on right away, you take a moment to look closely. You notice his age (which helps estimate a birth year), where he was living, and who else was in the household. Now you have more than you started with.

Step 5: Record What You Found

You add this to your research log. You record what you searched, where you found it, and what the record tells you. You now have a clear record of your work, and you can make a note of what next steps you intend to take.

Step 6: Follow the Next Clue

The census gives you a new direction. Now you can search for a birth record using the estimated year and location, look for the family in an earlier census, and/or identify parents or siblings. One step leads naturally to the next.

That's the process! It may not feel dramatic, but this is how genealogy works. Start with a question, search for one record, read it carefully, record what you find, follow the next clue, and repeat the process.

Progress Over Perfection.

You don't need to find everything at once or have every answer immediately. You don't need to understand every record perfectly. What matters is that you stay curious, move step by step, and build on what you learn. Over time, those small steps turn into something meaningful. You don't need to wait until you feel "ready." **You're ready now.**

What Comes Next

You've done something meaningful. You've taken the first steps into your family history—something many people think about, but never begin. That's not small work. That's the beginning of something lasting.

As you take the next step from here, you don't need to do everything at once. You just need to take one step forward. Maybe you'll start your 5-generation chart with your information. Maybe you'll call your grandparent and see if you can ask them some questions about their lives. Maybe you'll start looking for records to answer a question you have about an ancestor. Small steps add up over time, and what matters most is that you keep going.

At some point, you may find yourself unsure which record is correct, or get stuck on a question you can't quite answer. You might find yourself overwhelmed by the amount of information available. This is a natural part of the process. Genealogy can be simple at the beginning, but it can also become complex as you go deeper.

Every family has a story. Some are easy to find, and some take time. Some raise more questions than they answer. All of them matter. The good, the bad, and everything in between—it matters. What you're building is more than a collection of names and dates. It's a connection to the people who came before you, to the life you're living now, and to the stories that will continue long after you. It starts with a single step.

If you'd like guidance, support, or help taking the next step, we invite you to connect with us. You don't have to figure everything out on your own. When you're ready for support, Embracing Your History works with individuals, families, and communities to:

- build accurate, well-documented family trees
- help break through research challenges and "brick walls"
- preserve stories, memories, and family traditions
- create meaningful ways to share and pass down your history



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