

Building Your Genealogical Skills

Class #1: The Basics

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Objectives:

1. Students will be able to list the two principle rules of good genealogy research practice.
2. Students will be able list and apply the five steps for researching a family tree.
3. Students will understand the most important types of records used in genealogical research and the strengths and weaknesses of each.

Rule #1 – Work from the known to the unknown

Rule #2 – Write it down

Methodology

- Step #1- Identify what you know
- Step#2- Decide what you want to learn (research goal)
- Step#3- Identify and locate your sources
- Step#4- Research!
- Step#5- Analyze

Repeat steps as needed

Step #1- Identify what you know

Starting your genealogical documentation is as simple as purchasing a spiral bound notebook for your notes, but several standard forms greatly simplify the task of recording important genealogical information. Most genealogical software programs will generate reports in these basic formats. Plan to make liberal use of these forms.

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Tools

- Pedigree Chart: Road map of your ancestors and includes basic information about each person such as full name, date and place of birth, death, and marriage. Each person on the chart receives a number.
- Family Group Sheet: The family group sheet provides a snapshot of each nuclear family and records pertinent information about each family member.
- Research Plan: Your roadmap for research – your hypotheses, research objectives and where you will search.
- Research Log: Research logs are an excellent way to keep track of the research you have already completed. They contain a list of every source you consulted—and whether your search was successful or not.

Techniques

- Interview Questions: Interviewing your relatives may seem like a daunting task.
- Genealogical Recording Standards:
 - Names
 - Write surnames in all CAPITAL LETTERS
 - Record a woman using her maiden name
 - When a maiden name is unknown use MNU/--?--/just the given name _____
 - Dates
 - Record dates as DAY-MONTH-YEAR (ex: 16 January 2016)
 - **DO NOT** use slash marks or two digit years (ex: 1/16/2016 or 1/16/2016)
 - Places
 - Note smallest to largest geographic division (ex: Boston, Suffolk County, Massachusetts)
 - For outside the U.S.: townland/parish, county, country
 - Be sure to identify counties
 - **DO NOT** use postal abbreviations (ex: Massachusetts, **NOT** MA or Mass)

Step #2- Decide what you want to learn

Once you created a five-generation chart or a family group sheet (you may have gathered this known information from an interview, family papers, photographs, or a family bible) you must then determine what information is lacking.

- Are there missing dates or locations?
- How about missing names? Are parents missing? Maiden names?

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- Next, determine what individuals or families intrigue you the most? It's best to tackle one line at a time.
- Create a list of questions or objectives to research.

Tips:

1. **Start slowly.** Don't rush to answer all your questions at once.
2. **Don't skip generations** in planning your research; it only leads to misattributed people.

Step #3- Identify and Locate Your Sources

Tools

The internet and the library provide the most accessible sources of information about family history, although not everything is online or in a book. An efficient use of the internet or the library rests on understanding where the information you seek may be found.

1. Genealogical Records

- Vital Records created by governments
- Vital Records created by religious institutions
- Vital Records created by families
- Census
- Cemeteries
- Immigration and Emigration Records
- Naturalization and Citizenship Records
- Land and Property
- Probate
- Taxation
- Military
- Newspapers

2. Other Sources of Genealogical Information

- Compiled genealogies
- Local histories
- Biographies
- How-to Guides and Similar Resources
- Digitized Books:
 - <https://www.hathitrust.org/>
 - <https://books.google.com/>
 - <https://archive.org/index.php>
 - <https://openlibrary.org/>
 - <https://books.familysearch.org>
 - <http://library.si.edu/digital-library>

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- Guidebooks:
 - Michael Leclerc, ed., *Genealogist's Handbook for New England Research*, 5th ed. (Boston: NEHGS, 2012)
 - *Red Book: American State, County, and Town Sources*, 3rd ed. (Ancestry Publishing, 2004)
 - *The Source: A Guidebook to American Genealogy*, 3rd ed. (Ancestry Publishing, 2006)
 - *New York Family History Research Guide and Gazetteer*, 1st ed. (New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, 2015)

- Portable Genealogists
 - Immigration to the U.S.
 - U.S. Naturalization
 - NY State Census
 - MA State Census
 - Federal Census: 1790-1840
 - Federal Census: 1850-1940
 - Organizing your Research
 - Problem Solving in Irish Research
 - 17th Century New England Research
 - Using DNA in Genealogy
 - African American Resources
 - Applying to Lineage Societies
 - Building a Genealogical Sketch
 - Genealogical Numbering
 - Editorial Stylesheet
 - Reference Notes
 - Indexing

- Subject Guides: <http://www.americanancestors.org/Education/Learning-Resources/Read>
- Family Search Wiki: https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Main_Page
- NEHGS webinars
 - Upcoming <http://www.americanancestors.org/Education/Online-Classes/>
 - Archived <http://www.americanancestors.org/Education/Learning-Resources/Watch>

Step #4- Research

1. Begin answering your questions
2. Consult multiple sources
3. Gather as many records about a family or individual that you can find
4. Track your work.

Step #5- Analyze

1. Don't just read, examine
 - Records – Contain one or more pieces of genealogical information
 - Sources – Contain multiple records
2. Sources
 - Is it the original or a copy?
 - When was the source created (original source rather than the electronic database source)?
 - Who created the source?
 - What formulas were used in creating the source?
3. Records
 - When was the record created?
 - Who created the record?
 - Who provided the information?